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Labor's Future?

IN THE UNITED STATES

A SPECIAL ISSUE

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Religion and the Life of the Intellect

In many intellectual circles the myth still circulates that religion is the preserve of the dim-witted and unlettered. Yet, recently *The New York Times Magazine* carried an article on the "return to religion" among intellectuals. From Harvard to Berkeley, and amid inquisitive people generally, there's an undeniable renewal of interest in the questions traditional religion raises and seeks to answer. This fascination is largely a result of the failures of secular substitutes for religion (such as rationalism, narcissism, technological utopianism, aestheticism, and extremist political ideologies) to give abidingly satisfying answers to the truly significant puzzles in life: goodness, suffering, love, death, and the meaning of it all.

By no means, however, does this religious renaissance entail embracing the ersatz gods of dog-eat-dog individualism, consumerism, or superpatriotism. Nor does it imply a retreat from working for peace, justice, or human dignity. Rather, there's an awareness that, as Jean Bethke Elshtain put it, religious commitment "can help further social reform," and that religion can supply the ethical bedrock upon which to make political choices which are far more durable than those based on passing ideologies and enthusiasms. Nor does the new openness to religion signify a hostility to science, but rather an appreciation of the limits of science and technology.

The New York Times Magazine article discussed the NEW OXFORD REVIEW as part of this return to religion, and rightly so. We at the NEW OXFORD REVIEW are spearheading today's intellectual engagement with what Daniel Bell terms "the sacred." We are particularly interested in exploring religious commitments that yield humane social consequences, as exemplified by such giants as St. Francis, Gandhi, Bonhoeffer, Barth, Tawney, Schumacher, Mounier, Dorothy Day, Archbishop Tutu, Simone Weil, Martin Luther King Jr., and Archbishop Romero. And we probe the literary and philosophical riches offered by such greats as Kierkegaard, Tolstoy, Buber, Auden, Eliot, Silone, Maritain, Waugh, Merton, C.S. Lewis, Walker Percy, Flannery O'Connor, and Graham Greene.

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DISSENT (ISSN 0012–3846), issued January 1, 1992, is published quarterly, winter, spring, summer, and fall, by the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas, Inc., 521 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. Subscriptions: $22.00 for one year; $40.00 for two years; $15.00 for students for one year; foreign subscriptions, including Canada, add $5.00 for mailing costs per year; institutional rate $30.00 per year, $50.00 for two years, single copy $6.00. All payments from foreign countries must be made by United States money orders or checks payable in United States currency. For special rates on bulk orders from organizations, teachers, etc., write directly to DISSENT. For information on newsstand and bookstore distribution write to: Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 1130 Cleveland Road, Sandusky, Ohio 44870.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Dissent*, 521 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

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Front cover design by Robert Schwartz.

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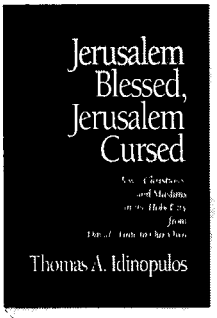

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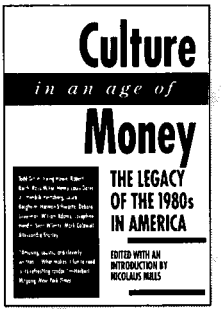

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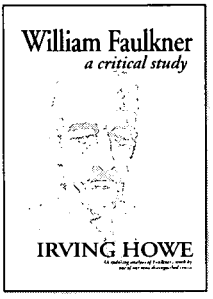

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Mark Levinson

OUR ECONOMY KEEPS LIMPING

It has been a rough few months for George Bush. Last summer the administration believed that the recession was caused by jittery consumers who quit spending because of the Gulf War. But the economic slowdown was not related to the war. This recession was brought on by weak consumer demand caused by eighteen years of falling incomes for most Americans and cutbacks in the welfare state under Reagan and Bush. The long-run contradictions of American society (as Mike Harrington would surely say, if only he were here) are now its short-run problems.

In October it was announced that real Gross National Product (GNP) increased by 2.4 percent during the third quarter. This meager uptick in GNP led the administration to proclaim—for the second time in three months—that the recession was over. But a closer look at the figures reveals a languid economy. Most of the increase in GNP was accounted for by a buildup in business inventories rather than by consumer spending. As I write (in late November), sales of existing homes fell for the third month in a row, new jobless claims are running at 450,000 a week, and commercial construction is at a sixteen-year low. Many forecasters expect GNP to fall in the fourth quarter of this year.

Indications of America's economic troubles abound.

• **Poverty** In 1990, 13.5 percent of all Americans—33.6 million people, an increase of over 2 million from 1989—lived in poverty. More than one in five children are poor. Black children under the age of six have a poverty rate of over 50 percent. As bad as this is, poverty will almost certainly increase in 1991. Unemployment has risen (from 5.5 percent in 1990 to around 7 percent in 1991), and wages have continued their slide downward. Average hourly wages for nonsupervisory workers were lower, adjusting for inflation, in 1990 than in any year since 1964.

• **Food Stamps** Twenty-four million Americans (a record level) receive federal food stamps. Almost one in ten Americans now depends on government to put food on the table. Lest anyone mistake this as an example of a generous welfare-state program, consider that the average benefit for each person, per meal (assuming three meals a day) is only 65 cents.

• **Unemployment** The most recent unemployment rate of 6.8 percent represents seven million unemployed workers. This understates the problem because it does not include millions of Americans too discouraged to look for work or those in part-time jobs who would prefer to work full time. Even adding discouraged workers and involuntary part-time workers to the official unemployment figure does not capture the full extent of unemployment. Close to twenty million workers—15 percent of the work force—experienced at least one spell of unemployment last year. That is nearly three times the number of jobless workers counted in the monthly report. For black and Hispanic workers, one in five experienced at least one spell of unemployment last year.

• **Overall Economic Performance** A study by the Democratic staff of the Senate Budget Committee found that President Bush has the worst economic performance—the study looked at economic growth, job creation, and increase in the standard of living—of any president since the end of World War II. For example, while Bush has been president the economy has grown at an annual average of only 0.6 percent, one-third of the previous low of 1.5 percent under President Ford. Most ominous of all is that real disposable income—the amount of money each American has after paying taxes—is now lower than when Bush took office. According to Edward Tufte, author of *Political Control of the Economy,* real disposable income during an election year is the single most important economic statistic for an incumbent president's reelection prospects.

With the nation's festering economic problems dominating headlines, the presidential election, which after the war Democrats had all but ceded to Bush, appears very much up for grabs. A *Washington Post*-ABC survey showed that only 47 percent of

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those polled were inclined to vote next year for Bush, down from 68 percent last March. Unemployment has replaced drugs and crime as the nation's biggest worry.

Bush is being forced to at least appear concerned about the economy. The first thing he did was try and find a culprit for the recession. He couldn't blame the Federal Reserve. He urged them to cut interest rates and they did. But this has had little effect. As long as demand is weak, businesses will be reluctant to invest, and without a growth in investment there will be no recovery.

In successive speeches Bush blamed bank lenders, bank regulators, credit-card companies, and finally the American people: "There ought to be, in my view, given the economic place where we stand now, more confidence." The *Washington Post,* in a report that must have sent tremors through the White House, compared this last speech to Jimmy Carter's invocation of a supposed national malaise.

Bush's befuddlement has led to contradictory statements—often in the same speech. Right after he pleads with Americans to spend more money on consumer goods and housing he urges them to save more and proposes tax incentives to encourage savings. If Bush's confusion and inaction weren't hurting so many people it would be comical.

Although right-wing ideology may be in disarray, Ronald Reagan still casts a long shadow over the American political economy. It is now clear that the Laffer Curve rationale for Reaganomics—lower tax rates would spur people to work harder, stimulate economic growth, and return enough to the treasury to balance the budget—was never taken seriously. Reagan, or whoever ran the government while he was in office, purposefully created a large deficit to ensure that the federal government had no income to do anything even if it wanted to. In his first televised address to the nation, two weeks after taking office, Reagan said,

> There were always those who told us that taxes couldn't be cut until spending was reduced. Well, you know, we can lecture our children about extravagance until we run out of breath. Or we can cure their extravagance by simply reducing their allowance.

The Reagan deficits have had the desired effect—they have paralyzed the Democrats. It was concern about the deficit that led to Walter Mondale's disastrous proposal to raise taxes in the 1984 campaign. It also led Michael Dukakis to refuse to run a populist campaign lest his credentials as a budget balancer be questioned.

A group associated with the Economic Policy Institute—especially Jeff Faux and Robert Kuttner—has argued that obsession with the deficit is more of a threat than the deficit itself, especially if it prevents us from making much-needed public investments. In the 1980s the real problem was not the deficit, but that it was created by wasteful military spending and tax giveaways for the rich. (The best explanation of why the deficit is not an important economic problem is in Robert Heilbroner and Peter Bernstein, *The Debt and The Deficit: False Alarms/Real Possibilities.*)

The Democrats have yet to get over their fear of the deficit. They have proposed an assortment of tax cuts for the middle class that are all deficit neutral (the tax cuts would be "paid for" either by cutting defense spending or by increasing taxes on the rich). Tax relief for the middle class is worthwhile, but it is not a program for economic recovery. In fact, proposals to cut defense spending to fund middle-class tax cuts may actually make the recession worse. If money is transferred from the Pentagon (which imports relatively little) to middle-class consumers (who buy more imports), the net effect on the U.S. economy will be a loss of jobs and income.

Although equitable tax reform should be part of a democratic left program, Jeff Faux reminds us that taxes are not the most important cause of the increase in inequality:

> The problem of stagnant incomes—now reflected in the weakness of retail sales—is not fundamentally a problem of tax policy. Indeed, more than 80 percent of the recent upward shift in the share of income going to the richest 20 percent of families is a result of changes in before-tax income.
>
> The problem lies in the deteriorating competitiveness of the economy itself, which has not been generating the level of income needed to maintain the living standards of the majority of working people. Unless we substantially raise investments in our people and our technological development, real wages and incomes for most American workers will continue to decline, regardless of what we do with the tax system.

A democratic left program should focus on stimulating the economy, which means investing the peace dividend even if it results in a larger deficit.

What is needed is a public-sector investment strategy. The low level of public investment threatens permanent economic decline. Robert Heilbroner has illustrated the seriousness of the problem: if we were to double our public investment in infrastructure and human capital, we would just return to the relative level of public investment the United States made throughout the 1950s and 1960s. But even that would not bring us close to the level of investment currently being made in Germany and Japan.

The Reagan era, which began with the dismantling of the public sector, will end with the reconstruction of the public sector. □

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After the Fall of Communism

Shlomo Avineri

CAPITALISM HAS NOT WON, SOCIALISM IS NOT DEAD

The fall of the communist regimes of Eastern Europe and the rapid disintegration of the Soviet Union raise the question of whether conclusions may now be drawn in the historic argument over the nature of the capitalist system. Has the communist collapse proved that the socialist idea is fundamentally flawed, that in the final analysis capitalism has demonstrated its efficiency and superiority?

This is undoubtedly what is accepted now in the West, and its clearest ideological expression was offered two years ago in Francis Fukuyama's article "The End of History," which was (briefly) canonized as the new testament of American conservatism. Even though an evaluation of the failure of the Soviet system does not relate directly to the concept of democratic socialism in the West, this article clearly suggests not only that Soviet communism is a failure but that any challenge to the principles of the free market and capitalist economics has now been proven to be fundamentally spurious.

And yet, an evaluation of the developments in the Soviet Union and the nations of the former Warsaw Pact requires the utmost caution, since the process is still underway. At least from the Yugoslav example it may be learned that the alternative to communism is not necessarily democracy and capitalism; it could also be nationalistic regimes competing against each other in murderous extremism.

Therefore, anyone observing the events in Eastern Europe must pose three linked questions. Only a measured examination of all three will permit even a temporary verdict on the meaning of these developments: (1) What is the social and political character of the system now collapsing in the Soviet Union?; (2) Is the capitalist system now on the ascendant everywhere?; and (3) What is the character of the Western capitalist system today and what is its relationship to the capitalism of the nineteenth century, which was the object of the socialist critique—not only of Marx, but also of such socialist theoreticians as Saint-Simon, Fourier, Proudhon, and others?

From the viewpoint of the Marxian socialist canon itself, it must be noted that the Soviet system was not and could not have been a socialist system (without considering what its leaders claimed it to be). Marxism saw socialism as a stage that would follow capitalism and take its place. Marx and his disciples repeatedly emphasized that socialism was inherently a postcapitalist system. Socialism constitutes, in the Marxian view, the dialectical antithesis of capitalism, and as such it is necessarily built on the foundations of capitalism and the institutional arrangements connected with it: civil society, advanced industrial economy, a strong bourgeoisie, representative government, freedom of the press, and a strong working class.

This article first appeared in September 1991 in the Israeli labor daily *Davar* and is translated here with the permission of its author, a distinguished political analyst and author of many books in political thought. We print it as a contribution to the ongoing discussion in our pages, from various points of view, regarding the world after communism.—EDS.

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All of these are elements of capitalism, and for all that Marx was skeptical of this system's ability to resolve its internal contradictions, he still saw the factors constituting that system as the building blocks from which socialism would arise. If it is true that socialism is to arise from the ruins of capitalism, then this capitalist structure has first to exist before it can be replaced. According to Marx's theory, it is impossible to create socialism without the prior economic, social, and conceptual foundation involved in a capitalist system.

Marx never foresaw the possibility of building a socialist system in precapitalist countries, and certainly not under the slogan of "socialism in one country." For this reason he opposed Lassalle when he entertained the possibility of a direct transition in Germany from the Bismarck regime to socialism: such a transition would create "Prussian socialism." To the anarchist Bakunin's ruminations on social revolution in Russia, without capitalism or a bourgeoisie, and a direct transition to a socialist system, Marx reacted with alarm: it would result in a "barracks socialism," he claimed. In a debate with the Russian revolutionary Alexander Herzen, Moses Hess reacted to the possibility of a socialist revolution in Russia, without a capitalist, parliamentary transitional stage, as a recipe for the establishment of a "new Byzantium."

Lenin and his comrades adhered faithfully to this approach—first in the revolution of 1905, and afterward during the February 1917 revolution. Against the view of the Russian Narodniks and the Social-Revolutionary party (SR), Lenin and his allies rejected the possibility of a shortcut from a precapitalist Russia, without civil society, to socialism. In Lenin's view, the revolution coming in Russia would be a bourgeois democratic revolution, and only in that setting would the industrial development be possible that would permit the rise of a proletariat, which would be followed by the victory of socialist revolution.

In the terrible crisis of 1917 Lenin and his comrades changed their theme and were drawn with messianic haste toward a shortcut from czarism to socialism. The result was necessarily something resembling collectivist czarism, as the Soviet revolution, while destroying the czarist regime, adopted many of its cardinal features—centralized government, an appointments procedure controlled from the top ("democratic centralism" and *nomeklatura*), political police, exile to Siberia, lack of a representative system, repression of national minorities, a unique Russian national role (Stalin's "socialism in one country"), and finally the transformation of the peasantry into serfs and the state ("collectivization of agriculture"). As has been noted in the past, Peter the Great would have felt comfortable in Stalin's Kremlin.

It was neither the personality of Stalin nor his particular policies that made the Soviet regime what it became. The original sin was the decision by Lenin, in the winter of 1917–18, to disperse by force the first Constituent Assembly chosen in Russia by free elections. A majority in this assembly was held by the three socialist parties, Social Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, and Bolsheviks, but not by Lenin's Bolshevik bloc alone. The Stalinist repressions, the Gulag, and the terrors of totalitarianism, were a natural outcome of the fatal decision by Lenin to try and impose socialism on a precapitalist society. It is likely that Lenin's retreat to the NEP (New Economic Policy) regime, which contained harbingers of a market economy, is evidence that he recognized this dilemma, but his death put an end to that option.

After 1945 the Soviet model was forcibly imposed by the Red Army on the other nations of Eastern Europe—again in defiance of socialist, Marxist, or any other theory. Socialism never foresaw its imposition through an army of occupation.

It is this model that is now disintegrating. This society and socialism have nothing in common, just as there is nothing in common between Ivan the Terrible and Christianity, even though the czar was baptized as a Christian.

In short, from the socialist viewpoint there was no chance of actualizing socialism in the conditions of the Soviet Union. What collapsed there was not and could not have been socialism. What is now passing from the world is one more of the many forms of human

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servitude. Socialism by its very nature involves freedom. If the Leninists thought after their fatal error of 1917 that they could separate the two, reality proved that the confused attempt to create "socialism" without freedom, and in precapitalist conditions, leads to the creation of that oppressive monster called the Soviet system.

That is now recognized by Gorbachev and his allies. The fact that so many good people were swept up in the ideological maelstrom of communist messianism only shows that human frailty sometimes does not spare even the finest intellects. The Spanish Inquisition was led by some of the best minds of the Christian clergy, yet there is nothing in common between Torquemada and the Sermon on the Mount.

The complex disintegration of the communist regimes shows that it is still difficult to foretell the nature of what will follow the centralized Soviet system. Nor is it clear that there will be a single alternative. It is far more reasonable to assume that developments will vary from place to place. The transition to capitalism, or to democracy on the political plane, is difficult and complex, and its chances in each country are linked to local traditions and history. In those places where there had been democratic regimes, or even partial attempts to create democracy (Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland), the transition seems possible, despite the difficulties. But it is hard to assume that countries like Romania or Bulgaria are on their way to a market economy or parliamentary democracy. The horror unfolding in Yugoslavia suggests that forty-five years of communism have not swept away the nationalist enmities that turned the Balkans into the snakepit of the nineteenth century.

Likewise within the borders of the Soviet Union. To assume that it is possible to create a market economy in the Soviet Union within five hundred days, after seventy-five years of a Soviet regime, and after four hundred years of czarism, is sheer fantasy. In the West, capitalism arose and democracy developed over the course of hundreds of years, and the two systems require a civil society and political and social traditions that cannot simply be created ex nihilo. The experience in Germany and Italy of sliding into nazism and fascism are evidence of how complex the process remains, even in the West.

There is something vaguely Bolshevik in the faith that capitalism can be created in the Soviet Union via some law or presidential ukase. The experience resembles the Leninist fallacy of trying to establish socialism in the Soviet Union by fiat, without the necessary social and economic conditions. Then as now there was complete disregard for the actual socioeconomic reality and a deep faith, made up in equal parts of mysticism and ignorance, that systems can be imposed and overturned by an act of legislation and administrative dictate.

Anyone observing postcommunist Eastern Europe would be hard-pressed to find proof of the unambiguous triumph of capitalism or the success of democracy. What the observer will find there in fact is the reawakening of the national consciousness, ethnic conflicts and intolerance that characterized these societies before the communist takeover (and it is in this context that one must understand the reemergence of anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe). The process of "privatization," too, is extremely complicated, and creates ample opportunities for the activities of established bureaucracies that now find themselves freed from central oversight and are forging quasi-feudal islands of authoritarian control over economic resources.

The tendency to focus on the charisma of populist leaders like Lech Walesa and Boris Yeltsin is reminiscent more of Peronist phenomena than of democracy. It is likely that the Russia or Poland of the year 2000 will resemble Argentina or Brazil more than Great Britain or the Netherlands.

All this is very far from an unequivocal victory of liberalism or capitalism. There are other possibilities, and one should not make the mistake of seeing the world as a polarity in which anything that is not communist and totalitarian is necessarily capitalist and democratic.

What of the capitalist systems that exist today in the West? One of the most striking historical paradoxes, perhaps, lies in the fact that socialism might have its strongest impact

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in the industrialized countries of the West. It was in these countries that the socialist doctrine was supposed to have been actualized—and clearly the radical Marxist prediction did not come to pass. But in fact the face of these societies, as they exist today, was shaped in no small measure by the socialist critique of the predatory capitalism of the nineteenth century.

England, France, Germany, and the United States of today are a world away from the unbridled capitalism upon which the socialist critics poured their wrath in the nineteenth century. The capitalism of the early nineteenth century was characterized by unbridled competition and absolute nonintervention by the state in economic processes. Trade unions were outlawed, since workers' organizations were seen as contradicting the principle of free choice and freedom of contractual association; strikes were seen as acts of rebellion, and their activists were punished accordingly; there were no legal limits on the number of work days in the week or of working hours in the day; there were no restrictions on women's and children's labor; there were no provisions for insurance in the face of unemployment, illness, disability, or old age; workers had no right to vote, as the political franchise was conditioned on property ownership or minimum tax payment; there were no public health or welfare services, except for church charities; and education was the preserve of narrow social classes, in the absence of public financing for education.

The capitalist systems of today are radically different from these systems, and it is not important whether they are now called the "welfare state" or "social market economy" or "reformed capitalism." What is important is the fact that Western capitalism has indeed undergone a far-reaching social transformation.

It is safe to assume that if capitalism had not undergone this transformation, it would indeed have collapsed as its socialist critics predicted.

This is undoubtedly a unique historical dialectic. Part of the structural social changes that Western industrial capitalism has adopted were accepted under pressure from the labor movement and socialist criticism, joined for humanitarian reasons by liberal critics who were not socialists (particularly in the areas of women's and children's labor and minimum conditions of social legislation). Part of the changes were accepted as a preventive defense strategy, in order to divide sectors of the working class from revolutionary movements through improvement of their living conditions. Thus, for example, we see the social legislation that Bismarck initiated in united Germany after 1871, in the course of a bitter political struggle against the socialists. Likewise the American New Deal was connected, at least in part, with an effort to curb the influence of the communists and the Soviet Union.

The gradual extension of the right to vote, which was difficult to oppose on grounds of liberal principle, gave the socialist movement considerable political weight. No longer were the workers lacking in political representation, and the various governments and parties were obliged to compete for workers' votes.

Severe economic crises, such as in 1929, as well as the two world wars, expanded the need for state intervention in the economy and led to a reduction in the alienation of workers from the overall fabric of society. As a result of this process, it was clearly no longer possible to tell the workers they had nothing to lose but their chains.

As such, one may say of today's capitalism, in contrast with the rampant capitalism of the nineteenth century, that it is beginning to show signs of being a "capitalism with a human face." As distant as it is, even in Western Europe and the United States, from being a perfect system (something no human system will ever be), still, it is not the monster that emerges from the *Communist Manifesto* or the writings of Dickens.

This is a complex system, which has a broad public sector and significant social services (despite all the efforts of Thatcher and Reagan to narrow their scope); this is a system that cannot ignore the hardships of broad social classes, because it is based on universal suffrage; this is also a system whose social values are far from being based on uncompromising, unbridled competition (and thus it is no coincidence that Milton Friedman was more accepted by the political architects in Pinochet's Chile than he is in many quarters of Western

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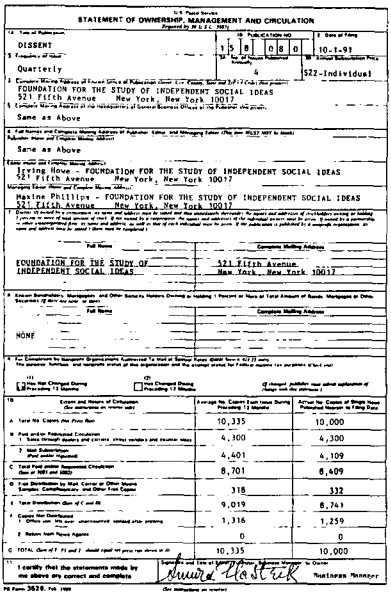
Europe); principles of human rights serve as its beacon, and as such there is significant restriction on the rights of private property, which is no longer a sacred trust, but must be balanced with other societal rights.

It is likely that one day, when someone tries to immortalize the person who inspired the complex developments that led to the rise of this system, Karl Marx will, ironically, be seen as the harbinger of this developed neocapitalist world, in which moral suasion, economic interest, and fear of revolution combined in a potent mixture to yield a more humane transformation of a system whose predatory beginnings threatened to destroy it from the outset.

As such, it is clear that the Western synthesis of today, which the postcommunist regimes of the East are seeking to emulate, teaches that just as in other historical instances, there are no decisive victors. It is clear that Soviet communism has failed, but what exists today in the West is not capitalism in all its ideological purity and atrocious practice. As always, historical development is more complex than the polar image of a war between good and evil. Varying shades of gray characterize the flight of the owl of Minerva, wisdom's bird, when it comes to deliver the judgment of history.

Translated from the Hebrew by
J. J. GOLDBERG □



STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION

1. Title of Publication: DISSENT	10. Publication No.: 1 5 8 0 0	2. Date of Filing: 10-1-91	
3. Frequency of Issue: Quarterly	4	$22-Individual	

3. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: FOUNDATION FOR THE STUDY OF INDEPENDENT SOCIAL IDEAS, 521 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10017

5. Complete Mailing Address of the Headquarters or General Business Offices of the Publisher: Same as Above

6. Full Names and Complete Mailing Address of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor: Same as Above

Publisher: Irving Howe - FOUNDATION FOR THE STUDY OF INDEPENDENT SOCIAL IDEAS, 521 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10017

Editor: Irving Howe - FOUNDATION FOR THE STUDY OF INDEPENDENT SOCIAL IDEAS, 521 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10017

Managing Editor: Maxine Phillips - FOUNDATION FOR THE STUDY OF INDEPENDENT SOCIAL IDEAS, 521 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10017

7. Owner: If owned by a corporation, give the name and address of the corporation immediately followed by the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, give the names and addresses of the individual owners. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as that of each individual member, must be given. If the publication is published by a nonprofit organization, its name and address must be stated.

Full Name	Complete Mailing Address
FOUNDATION FOR THE STUDY OF INDEPENDENT SOCIAL IDEAS	521 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10017

8. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities: If none, check box → None

Full Name	Complete Mailing Address
NONE	

9. For Completion by Nonprofit Organizations Authorized To Mail at Special Rates (DMM Section 424.12 only): The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for Federal income tax purposes: (Check one)

(1) ☐ Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months (2) ☐ Has Changed During Preceding 12 Months (If changed, publisher must submit explanation of change with this statement.)

10. Extent and Nature of Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
A. Total No. Copies (Net Press Run)	10,335	10,000
B. Paid and/or Requested Circulation: 1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales	4,300	4,300
2. Mail Subscription (Paid and/or Requested)	4,401	4,109
C. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation (Sum of 10B1 and 10B2)	8,701	8,409
D. Free Distribution by Mail, Carrier or Other Means Samples, Complimentary, and Other Free Copies	318	332
E. Total Distribution (Sum of C and D)	9,019	8,741
F. Copies Not Distributed: 1. Office use, left over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing	1,316	1,259
2. Return from News Agents	0	0
G. TOTAL (Sum of E, F1 and 2 - should equal net press run shown in A)	10,335	10,000

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H. Brand

REFORMING THE SOVIET ECONOMY

This article and the one that follows were written before the events of December 1991, which seem to indicate the end of the Soviet Union as we have known it. Nevertheless, we believe that the analyses in both articles remain cogent.—EDS.

The economic reform urged upon the Soviet Union by the great international financial institutions reduce to three elements— macroeconomic stabilization, freeing of all but a few prices, and ownership reform. These are discussed in *The Economy of the USSR,* a fifty-one page summary of more detailed studies, issued jointly by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (hereafter the IMF study).

Stabilization implies reduction of soaring budgetary deficits and tightening of credit, including an end to the subsidization of enterprises—such subsidization has been used to maintain relatively fixed prices, especially for food. The freeing of prices is to take place in conditions of "increased domestic and external competition," spelling the gradual integration of the Soviet Union into the global economy, and it is expected to lead to the "efficient allocation of resources." Ownership is to center upon the distributional and service trades and other small-scale operations. It does not unambiguously apply to state enterprises, which account for about 85 percent of employment. State enterprises are to be "commercialized," that is, they are to be managed as autonomous firms, eventually to be supervised by holding companies and subject to "hard budget constraints," meaning that they must pay their debts and meet their costs under threat of bankruptcy and closure.

The analysis and recommendations contained in the document are by and large in harmony with those advanced by the Soviet economists who had advised Mikhail Gorbachev prior to his "rightward" turn in the fall of 1990, and who had designed the "500-day" program he later rejected. (These economists are now close to Boris Yeltsin.)[1] Whatever the reasons for the rejection, the program was to be implemented with extreme rapidity; and rapidity of implementation is the recommendation of nearly all economists and institutions concerned with Soviet economic reform. The reason given is that the hardships that the reforms will visit upon the population will give rise to political resistance, best dealt with before it gathers too much strength.

For both the international institutions and Soviet economists, the transformation of the Soviet economy into one where the market governs spells efficiency and economic growth. Allowances are made for relieving the hardships that transformation entails, such as soaring prices, high unemployment, and deepening poverty of the aged, women, and youth. These hardships, we are assured, will be "short-term" or "transitional," and are to be relieved by unemployment insurance, food stamps, minimum wages, and so on. Such matters are treated virtually as asides, crumbs thrown to worried liberals and socialists. Efficiency remains the foremost concern and overrides any notions of redistributive equity that have been associated with the macroeconomic policies of Western governments for the past half century. Such proposals also have implications for employment, which the IMF study fails to analyze but which are foreshadowed by the enormous amount of unemployment in Poland and East Germany.

The crisis of the Soviet economy has

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followed upon a long period of declining economic growth, declining productivity, lessening effectiveness of capital investment in terms of the output it produced, lack of innovation, and technological stagnation. It has manifested itself first of all in aggravated shortages—shortages that began greatly to exceed their "usual" magnitudes. These spread from one product to another, in a sort of chain effect that arose from worsening disruptions in the production and delivery of raw materials, intermediate, and end products—disruptions that had been a common occurrence earlier and had somehow been dealt with, but which now became a chronic breaching of accustomed linkages. They led to, as well as resulted from, inter-enterprise barter of materials and products.

Underlying barter has been the rapid loss in the value of the ruble, as well as the trend to autarchy of regions and localities (for example, proof of residence has had to be shown in Moscow to obtain certain foods). Inflation (the ruble's loss in real value) has been attributed to two sources—excess demand by households fueled by wage hikes (the annual rate of remuneration in 1989 and 1990 ran more than four times that for 1985–87) and the much more active use of money by enterprises, which under the central planning system had been used simply as a unit of account to check plan fulfillment.[2] Owing to earlier reforms, enterprises' own and freely disposable funds rose by a factor of eight between 1985 and 1989.[3]

Under these circumstances prices soared, so that real incomes dropped sharply, reflected in the fact that retail sales reported no significant rise even in inflated rubles in early 1991. High prices, moreover, led to thriving illegal and semilegal sales by state-owned enterprises to the black and "shadow" markets and to cooperatives, raising final sales prices further and handicapping official wholesale and retail channels that must buy and sell at fixed prices. Furthermore, the liberalization of foreign trade and the right of firms to retain foreign exchange earnings have also led to increased export of scarce domestic goods, and thus to higher prices. The "freeing" of prices demanded by the IMF study became reality some time ago.

The evidently uncontrollable rise in the money supply has also stemmed from unprecedented increases in the Soviet Union's budgetary deficit, which had barely exceeded 2 percent in relation to the national product over the decades prior to 1986, but hit 10 percent and more in the late 1980s. Expenditures actually did not rise very much, but revenues dropped sharply, chiefly because of liberalization of enterprise finances and foreign-trade taxation. Moreover, only part of the revenue that the republics that compose (or composed) the Soviet Union had agreed upon to remit to the center were in fact received, further enlarging the deficit.

Perestroika has been called an economic failure by noted scholars, chiefly because it supposedly consisted of half measures and did not institute free-market relations.[4] It seems to me that perestroika failed on quite other grounds: it caused the center of the command economy to be irreversibly weakened by such measures as restricting the right of the industrial ministries to intervene in their tutelary enterprises on behalf of larger economic and social interests. Ministry staffs were cut by about one half, further undermining the center's enforcement powers. There followed a systemic breakdown that has lain at the root of the economic crisis. As Anders Aslund noted: "The traditional centrally planned system has largely collapsed but has not been replaced by a functioning market system."

What then are the prospects for the Soviet economy?

Two sets of forces are at work. One is the global corporate capitalism whose interests and ideology are advanced by the IMF study and whose model of the market economy is accepted by the Soviet economists mentioned earlier as the path to efficiency, prosperity, and political liberation from a heavy-handed bureaucracy. The other consists in what we might call the "bureaucratic capitalism" that has been emerging from the fading Stalinoid structure of the Soviet economy. This emergence is viewed with considerable alarm by Western observers, but it has strong native roots and is likely to prove irresistible. "Quietly, the union ministries are transforming themselves into Russian

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industrial corporations in the greatest management theft of the century, and nothing can stop them," writes Aslund. And the IMF study reports that "a process of spontaneous privatization is taking place in large sectors of industry through the leasing of facilities to cooperatives consisting of the managers and workers of state enterprises." Much additional evidence for this development is available.

Although "spontaneous privatization" would seem at first blush to accord with the marketization perspective of Western agencies and Soviet economists, it lacks the legitimacy that only a foundation in civil law, firmly anchored in and enforced by state institutions can ensure (it is, after all, "the greatest management theft . . ."). Not by accident, the IMF study explicitly refers in its title to the USSR; its authors doubt that marketization reforms are possible if the locus of power is not centered in the Union, in Moscow. In whatever ways legitimacy evolves, the ever more autonomous industrial enterprises in the Soviet Union tend to further the political and economic fragmentation of the country. For while the writ of the old center has been derogated and its coordinating functions weakened, "the command-administrative center has not been destroyed but has been fragmented and has taken a second breath at the regional level."[5] Enterprise management remains tied to the regional and local political apparatchiks. The autarchy in which the various regions have encapsulated themselves makes them the nodal points through which the economic and financial links to other regions and countries now run, and with which enterprise management must deal. Paradoxically, then, the advocates of marketization require a strong state—a state that protects property, legalizes the proposed holding companies to provide some measure of public control over the commercialized state enterprises, and maintains competition by "demonopolizing" the virtual cartels that the various industrial ministries have constituted. By contrast, the evolving "bureaucratic capitalism" thrives under the umbrella of regional and local authorities and the close personal and business relations among managers, administrators, and political bosses this umbrella fosters, as well as the monopoly position it safeguards.

The two sets of forces will likely be in a persistent conflict whose outcomes will be largely determined by the political power they can muster. Both sets, however, must labor under a common condition, the one by choice, the other by necessity: both will be subject to a "hard budget constraint," since the financial means to subsidize such enterprise functions as capital investment will be sparse, if available at all. That is bound to lead to high costs, compelling the installing of labor-saving devices, the shedding of labor, and weeding out losing product lines and firms. It spells an inevitable rise in unemployment, a rise which Soviet labor analysts have estimated at sixteen to eighteen million persons over the next few years, roughly 13 percent of the Soviet labor force.[6] Thus, unemployment will likely be as profound a social problem for the Soviet Union as ethnic strife, itself already a major source of employment dislocations.

Beyond question, the transformation of the Soviet economy is a necessity. It will exact sacrifices that must ultimately be ascribed to the bankruptcy of the command system, sustained for decades by a totalitarian party apparatus. Can these sacrifices be lightened? True, no precedent exists for the depth of economic breakdown experienced in the Soviet Union that might be a "model," a rough guide for the way out. But, as in other great nations, the people of the Soviet Union are capable of producing self-healing forces, as proved by the very emergence of glasnost and perestroika, however flawed. Forms of market regulation in addition to, and, where needful, overruling prices must be found; and here the way has been shown by Ota Sik, the Czech economist. Among the features of Sik's Third Way is the democratic determination of the distribution of real resources between investment and consumption, with the market and its price system allocating the resources, given such determination. Full employment would be a firm policy goal. Possibly, Sik's Third Way could be applied in Soviet conditions, but this is not likely to happen.

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Instead there will probably arise a species of Thatcherism in the Soviet Union, so that the assurances that unemployment will be short term and transitional will turn out to be empty. It is revealing that a British adviser to the Polish Finance Ministry, responding to protestations that the "market" should not be allowed to close a factory employing 35,000 people, thought, why not? "You have three to four to five years of 50 percent unemployment in some towns. . . . When Thatcher closed coal mines, there was 50 percent unemployment in some towns for several years."[7] As Peter Jenkins has written, Thatcherism signified the deliberate abandonment of full employment; its supply-side economics were chiefly directed against labor market "rigidities"; the cost of recovery from the long recession of the 1980s was the neglect of the poorer sections of Great Britain's cities; and unemployment, which averaged between 7 percent and 12 percent of the labor force between 1981 and 1989, ran to 25 percent in the country's vast public housing estates.[8] Unemployment in fact, far from being of brief duration, has been the scourge of European OECD countries generally throughout the 1980s, hovering between 8 percent and 11 percent, with fifteen million of their residents unemployed in 1989.

Yet Thatcherism has been the political-economic model for influential groups of East European economists. The extremism of Thatcher's attack on British social democracy evidently impressed these groups as a way to stir the workers of Eastern Europe from their alleged lethargy and indifference to productive work. The callous disregard of the social consequences of Thatcherism and of the marketization these economists have tried to introduce in their own countries recalls a similar disregard shown by the old communists in pursuit of their "historical mission," although that mission at least derived from a vision more generous than that of the free-market advocates. □

A longer article by H. Brand on the subject of the failure of the Soviet economy will appear in the Spring issue of *Dissent*.—Eds.

Notes

[1] For an easily accessible representative point of view of Soviet economists, see Graham Allison and Grigory Yavlinsky, *Window of Opportunity: The Grand Bargain for Democracy in the Soviet Union* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991).

[2] Anders Aslund, *Gorbachev's Struggle for Economic Reform* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press), p. 188.

[3] Ibid., p. 187. Other materials also were drawn upon.

[4] Ibid., p. 225. See also the extensive and cogent discussion in Nicolas Spulber, *Restructuring the Soviet Economy: In Search of the Market* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).

[5] *Izvestiya,* November 21, 1990, quoted in Aslund, op. cit., p. 96.

[6] Y. Antosenkov, "A New Employment Concept in Soviet Labor Legislation," in Guy Standing, ed., *The New Soviet Labour Market: In Search of Flexibility* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1991), p. 74.

[7] Quoted in the *New York Times,* October 25, 1991, p. D4.

[8] See Peter Jenkins, *Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).

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Abraham Brumberg

CHANGES IN RUSSIA AND THE AMERICAN RIGHT

The events set off by Mikhail Gorbachev were welcomed by some and caused vexation to others. Among the latter were politicians, journalists, and scholars for whom the external fixity of communism was something of an article of faith. Gorbachev's reforms, if genuine and long-lasting, would call into question their entire worldview—and that of course can be rather upsetting.

The Gorbachev challenge was most acute for the adherents of the "Evil Empire" theory. It was they, after all, who had honed conventional wisdom about the Soviet Union and—especially since Ronald Reagan's election—had set the parameters of public debate about the nature of revolutionary, "left-wing" or "Marxist-Leninist" movements and regimes.

Their increasing impact on public opinion was part of a growing conservatism, primarily in the United States but also in other countries. Today's op-ed pages are given over largely to George Will, William Safire, Charles Krauthammer, Abe Rosenthal, and other spokesmen of the right. Partly liberal publications, such as the *New Republic*, often embraced the "Evil Empire" theory, especially with regard to Central American left-wing movements, while for unabashedly conservative journals—*Commentary*, the *New Criterion*, the *Public Interest*, the *National Interest*—and the conservative think tanks and foundations (Center for Strategic and International Studies, Heritage, Olin) that often underwrite them, the term "totalitarian" embraced not only the Soviet Union and China but also Sandinista Nicaragua, Hungary, and even the bulk of the African National Congress.

Diverse as these conservatives were, they were united by a belief that the Soviet regime, "a state unlike any other," was characterized by "its apparent immutability," and that the single most important objective of the "free world" was to combat it.[1] Thus the extraordinary events in the Soviet Union and East Europe, with their shock wave effect, were bound to bring them all to their feet.

I want here to examine some of the recent views of American adherents of the "totalitarian model" of communism. By 1989–90, to be sure, some of the conservative critics abandoned positions they once held tenaciously, but others remained committed, and a few brave acrobats tried to do both.

The first two years of Gorbachev's reign, for all their innovations, met with considerable "wait and see" skepticism. Given previous disillusionments, some skepticism was a rational response. By 1987, however, the Gorbachev "thaw" could hardly be dismissed as merely another chimera. Glasnost was in high gear, and while political and economic institutions had barely begun "restructuring," the atmosphere in the Soviet Union had undergone an oceanic change. The press was publishing searing criticisms of past and present Soviet policies. The party was being openly mocked for its pretensions to "infallibility." Work on a new criminal code was underway, with special attention to laws dealing with political dissent. Gorbachev had initiated a series of groundbreaking steps in the areas of arms control and international relations.

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All the evidence suggested that something serious was afoot in the Soviet Union, that Gorbachev was more than just another half-hearted or duplicitous *apparatchik* tinkering with a dilapidated machine, and that his policies had, at least potentially, revolutionary implications. To those who had always assumed that the Soviet system was capable of evolving, these were logical conclusions. Others, for reasons ideological or professional, responded to the evidence by dismissing it either as illusory or deliberately deceptive. More: in time-honored fashion, they derided those who were willing to take it seriously as naive, ignorant—and worse.

In 1986, two ex-Soviet scholars, historian Alexsandr Nekrich and literary critic Mikhail Heller, published a book, *Utopia in Power*, whose nearly nine hundred pages are dedicated to several related propositions: that the Soviet Union is the perfect model of a modern totalitarian state, which "finds life-giving energy only in expansionism"; that "regardless of historical traditions, geography, or national character, each country where a Soviet-style socialist system was installed produced *identical* results"; and that the USSR had succeeded in creating "a new man," *homo sovieticus*, who accepts "slavery" and wallows in corruption and hypocrisy, all out of fear of the state.

So susceptible were the authors to the thrall of Soviet mystifications that they pronounced the Soviet regime eminently "stable," a stability explained by a new kind of "social contract": "the citizens surrender their freedom to the state, and in exchange the state gives them the right (under its supervision) to abuse their positions and violate the law. At the same time the state guarantees minimal conditions for survival" (pp. 729–730).

Although Nekrich and Heller wrote their book years before Gorbachev came to power, they were loath to abandon their Orwellian nightmare. Even in the late 1980s, when tens of thousands of Soviet citizens were proving by word and deed that they were not willing to yield "their freedom" for a pot of kasha, Heller was warning anyone lending credence to Gorbachev's reforms that they were teetering on the edge of the same trap as early admirers of Mussolini, Hitler, or Stalin.

That both Nekrich and Heller were Soviet emigrés was not insignificant. A number of emigrés (many of them unhampered by virtual ignorance of English, convinced that American Sovietology was a nest of fools and apologists) published articles denouncing the changes in the Soviet Union as nothing but fraud.[2]

Such "testimony" by former Soviet citizens (including Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in his earlier writings) dovetailed with the arguments of Western conservative militants. In " 'Glasnost'—Lenin Loved It" (*Washington Post*, March 27, 1987), George Will, a man with a weakness for bogus scholarship, warned his readers not to be misled by Gorbachev's use of the word "glasnost." It has "a glittering pedigree," wrote the learned Mr. Will. In fact, "Lenin loved it" so much that he used it "46 times." How Will calculated this remarkable statistic he did not say (a concordance to Lenin's complete works?), but he bolstered his scholarly image by citing two of Lenin's pronouncements, which he characterized as being "of almost delphic inscrutability": " 'Glasnost is a sword which itself can heal the very wound it may inflict' "; and (Lenin loved martial metaphors) it is good to use " 'the artillery fire of party glasnost to combat vice and error.' " Anyway, "glasnost" can't be trusted: the Soviet press of 1987, in Will's view, "is full of Goebbels-like lies." "Perestroika," a word "Gorbachev adores," is equally meretricious and unoriginal: shockingly, Lenin used it first.

Six months later, Will warned the West to beware of Soviet arms-control proposals, which were nothing but a ruse (*Washington Post*, September 24, 1987). Three months after that, in "Drunk on Detente" (*Washington Post*, December 13, 1987), he repeated his warning, reminding his readers that the Soviet Union has always been guided by a quest for "world domination." "As soon as we are strong enough to defeat capitalism as a whole," said Lenin according to Will, "we shall take it by the scruff of the neck"—a colorful phrase, but one which, as it happens, Lenin never used.

In "Drunk on Detente" Will cited approvingly the notion, propounded by Angelo Codevilla in *Commentary* in 1987, that the Soviet Union "is as much of a threat as ever,

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maybe more." *Commentary* had for a long time been leading the fight against the "present danger" (to borrow the title of its editor's 1980 volume). In the process *Commentary* had also honed its skills in the art of imputation and insinuation—skills more in demand than ever, now that the West was on the verge of being (once again) hoodwinked by a wily and unscrupulous foe.

One tactic was to reaffirm the validity of the "totalitarian" model as an explanation of the Soviet system past and present. This took the form of demonstrating that Gorbachev's reforms could not—in theory and in fact—alter the essential nature of the Soviet system. His efforts were therefore either a deliberate deception or, if meant seriously (which was exceedingly unlikely), doomed to failure.

The argument against uncritically accepting the "totalitarian model" has been made elsewhere.[3] However valid the model had been for Stalinist Russia, it became less and less cogent after Stalin's death, both in the East European "satellites" (which in fact had never been perfect satellites) and in the Soviet Union. The "evolutionary school," which believed that the Soviet Union and the countries within its orbit were bound to alter and become (at least at first) more traditionally "authoritarian," has stood the test of time, up to the final collapse of communist rule.

To *Commentary*, such views have been anathema. In 1988 Walter Laqueur published a piece ("Glasnost & Its Limits," July 1988) that didn't quite fit the rigid Manichaeism favored by the editors. He attributed some fallacious Sovietological interpretations less to "ideological basis" than to "the traditional Western inability to understand political and social systems different from our own." Such tolerance was—well, intolerable. *Commentary* published a slashing letter by its resident emigré intellectual, Vladimir Bukovsky, who was happy to "straighten out" Laqueur. Only Soviet emigrés, said Bukovsky, truly understand the nature of the Soviet beast—the "most powerful machine of subjection and terror ever known, a machine which has so far been completely unaffected by perestroika." As for "all the sophisticated books and learned articles of the Sovietological mafia," they "have been exposed for what they are—a pile of trash" (November 1988).

Bukovsky's letter must have pleased the editors: a few years later, after the failed coup, they invited his comments. In "What to Do about the Soviet Collapse" (September 1991) Bukovsky declared that any accomplishments of the past few years—if indeed there were any—could not be credited to Gorbachev, who had consistently "stalled the process he himself had unwittingly triggered." Moreover, he deliberately provoked divisive ethnic clashes "in order to present Moscow as the only force capable of preserving peace." (This charge, incidentally, for which there is not a shred of evidence, has been voiced by some of Gorbachev's hostile critics inside the USSR, too.)

Bukovsky was repeating standard arguments of the right. In April 1988, for instance, *Commentary* published Alain Besançon's "Gorbachev Without Illusions," where the leading French proponent of the demonological view of the Soviet Union denounced any attempts to give Gorbachev any credit for anything. In January 1989 came the strongest reaffirmation of the "totalitarian" theory, "Is Communism Reversible?" by the French *nouveau philosophe* Jean-François Revel.

"Suddenly," said the author, apparently struck with the force of revelation, "it seems possible to think about the reversibility of communism"—which is to say that all previous attempts to reform the system, particularly Khrushchev's "thaw," were not even potentially serious. Revel assumed an open-minded posture: we must avoid, he asserted, the tendency to cling to the "old" belief that all changes are meaningless, though we must not assume that everything that was happening was "qualifiedly new."

After this wise beginning came the standard litany of grievances: that internal reforms do not necessarily accompany a diminution of expansionism; that Sovietologists have (again) "displayed inexhaustible ingenuity in their effort to explain the endlessly prolonged decrepitude of communist economies by any factor other than communism itself"; that

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glasnost, like the "thaw" twenty years earlier, "is a gift from on high" and, furthermore, "an instrument through which the general secretary can consolidate his own power by using the press to indict and, little by little, eliminate his predecessors' men." In short, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*

In light of the current note of triumphalism about the collapse of communism—the blithe assumption that it was all a Western "victory," and more specifically a vindication of the hard-nosed view of the Soviet Union and of the tough Reaganite policies it begot (Star Wars, Pershing missiles, and so on)—it is striking how little confidence the proponents of such policies had that their approach could result in the "reversal" of communism, or even a serious reduction of Soviet power. With their hypertrophy of the power of the Soviet state and their either-or solutions—either the system is fully dismantled or the changes amount to nothing; either full privatization or a perpetuation of the centralized economy (in Revel's words, "capitalism—everything else is froth")—the "hard-liners" dismissed any nuances and foreclosed all other options. Indeed, they endowed the system with far more resilience than did their "evolutionist" opponents. Revel was confident that "the balance sheet for the Kremlin for the entire period 1975–1990 will in the end be a positive one," especially in view of Gorbachev's firm determination to hang on to Eastern Europe! A few months later came the victory of Solidarity, the routing of communist rule in Czechoslovakia, and the fall of the Berlin Wall—developments Gorbachev not only did not try to prevent but actively supported.

In *Commentary*'s standard arsenal against "left intellectuals," innuendo sometimes slides into character assassination. One article deserves special mention: "The Anti-Cold-War Brigade," by Arch Puddington (August 1990). Neither Puddington's unfamiliarity with Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union nor what appears to be his total ignorance of any of the pertinent languages has deterred him from declaring himself frequently on this subject.

Puddington rounds up the usual suspects: Senators Fulbright and McGovern, Richard Barnet (of the Institute for Policy Studies), David Riesman, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and that arch-villain George Kennan. Apparently convinced that the proof of the pudding is not merely in the eating but in the overeating, Puddington even harks back to Henry Wallace, "the original dissenter from America's cold-war course, [whose] influence over succeeding generations of scholars and politicians was not insignificant."

Puddington singles out for attack Stephen Cohen, the Princeton historian known for his book on Bukharin. As usual, Arch P. goes overboard. He accuses Cohen of denying that the Soviet Union was a closed society—as if Cohen makes no distinctions between the USSR circa 1937 and the USSR circa 1987. He charges Cohen with maligning the proponents of the totalitarian theory, when what Cohen actually did was to present a picture—however overdrawn—of how the "cold war" atmosphere in the 1950s and 1960s affected the views of many scholars of Soviet affairs. Puddington's nasty attack drew a spirited reply from Robert Conquest (November 1990), who could hardly be accused of apologetic tendencies. While acknowledging political disagreements, Conquest praised Cohen's scholarship as "impeccable."

Puddington was left without a rebuttal, but not without allies in and outside *Commentary*. One "insider" was Jeane Kirkpatrick, author of the famous "theoretical" distinction between "totalitarian" and "authoritarian" systems. In a *Commentary* symposium published in the September 1990 issue, Kirkpatrick offered a version of her "they always blame America" theory. The (apologetic) attitude of American intellectuals toward communism, she argued, arose primarily from "their alienation from the United States," rather than from any real convictions or scholarly analysis. American leftists "disdain capitalism for much the same reason they disdain John Wayne and Ronald Reagan—because it seems so American."[4]

American anti-Americanism is a real phenomenon. However, whether American "leftists" (whoever they may be) really detest

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capitalism not because of its flaws but because they associate it with John Wayne, and whether dislike of capitalism automatically translates into "pro-Sovietism," are, to put it mildly, open questions. But Kirkpatrick is not alone in reaching such conclusions. George Will, for instance, excoriated the *New Yorker*'s "anti-anti-communism" as a form of "disdain for American public life." The editors of that ferociously radical magazine, added Will, "must be very sad to see a Europe infected so thoroughly by the virus that the *New Yorker* thinks has made American public life so disagreeable." ("Liberal Discontents," *Washington Post*, July 18, 1989.)

Inexhaustibly acid in pursuit of "leftists" is the columnist Charles Krauthammer. Take his "Kennan: Cold War Realist" (*Washington Post*, April 14, 1989). Apparently Kennan, on April 4, 1989, referred to the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia as "increased troop movements." Kennan is not a mealymouthed man, and this was patently—assuming Krauthammer quotes him correctly—a slip. But the columnist will not leave well enough alone, and so he hammers in his lessons: this was a "grotesque euphemism . . . a window onto Kennan's political philosophy," which scorns any moral considerations whatsoever. The shallowest familiarity with Kennan's writings demonstrates that Krauthammer's depiction is a shoddy caricature.

The *New York Times* has its own demonology specialists: William Safire, its resident linguist, and Abe Rosenthal, who excels in stridency. "I am pro witch hunt," he declared in a recent piece (September 2, 1991). "Fire every elected [Soviet] official who was a member of the party at the time of the coup." (That would come, conservatively, to about ten million people.) A year ago, when Gorbachev was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, Rosenthal grew livid: how can a prize be given to someone who "deserves credit for speeding the end of the Gulag—after communism began to collapse, not before?" (October 16, 1990). (It might appear to some that the Gulag's dismantlement actually preceded the collapse of communism.) The West is thinking of giving aid to the Soviets? Rosenthal turns apoplectic: this is more than terrible, "it is *mad*." Why should we give money to "criminals in charge of the Soviet Union [so that they may] remain in power?" (June 4, 1991).

The "left," and those particularly dangerous villains, professional Sovietologists, have become the favorite targets of Martin Malia, professor of history at Berkeley and author of a fine study of the nineteenth-century Russian liberal thinker Alexander Herzen.

Oddly enough, Malia launched his new career with an essay—"To the Stalin Mausoleum"—that appeared not under his own name, but under the pseudonym "Z." Why Malia was bent on disguising his identity, to the point of angrily rebutting the first stories disclosing his authorship, he has never explained. Be that as it may, the essay was a sweeping indictment of western Sovietology, as well as a passionate defense of "totalitarianism" as the only key to the understanding of "Sovietism" (a term first used by Leszek Kolakowski) past and present. According to Malia, the "revisionist" historians—that is, the group of scholars who were bent on minimizing, not dismissing, the horrors of Stalinism—are not a minority fringe but constitute the "the main line of American Sovietology." A suspect lot, they have "to a degree reflected Soviet thinking in the Moscow social science institutes of the USSR Academy of Sciences" and many have championed the idea of "democratic Stalinism," which should come as a surprise to those in the Sovietological community who are familiar neither with the work of Soviet social institutes nor with fried snow balls.

In his latest blast ("The Hunt for the True October," *Commentary*, October 1991), Malia notes that "revisionists" (that is to say, Sovietologists) come in various forms. Nevertheless, they all concur on "the absolute separation of Lenin and October from Stalin" and on the maxim "that with Gorbachev and perestroika the Soviet experiment would at last return to the True October, all aberrations overcome and all wrong things set aright." One can only wonder whether Malia assumes that all his readers are so ignorant as not to question this wild characterization.

Writing as "Z," Malia was still willing to

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give some credit to Gorbachev for launching "revolutionary policies," including a measure of democratization, and for attempting to "give real political life to both halves of the system of dual administration, in which all power, since Lenin, had belonged to the Party." As a result, Malia acknowledged, the "initially demagogic slogan 'All power to the people' began to acquire some real content"; a civic society began to emerge.[5]

Malia qua Malia, however begrudges even that much credit. In the *New York Review of Books* ("A New Russian Revolution?", July 18, 1991), Malia's analysis is rooted in conceptions of communist rule that predate perestroika, and he uses—with deliberate contempt—a language no longer at all appropriate to the reality of the Soviet Union ("Leninist regime," the "marxist burden," and so on). Malia's piece is predicated on Kirkpatrick's totalitarian model: the Soviet Union as a basically and necessarily inert system not subject to the same processes of social and economic change that affect democratic (and authoritarian) societies. He was therefore against giving any help to Gorbachev, even if the latter's goal were the "transition from a party-state and a command economy to democracy and the market," first, because he did not believe that to be Gorbachev's goal and second, because it would destroy the leading role of the party and result in the self-liquidation of communism, something Gorbachev clearly does not intend to do. Despite all evidence to the contrary, Malia insists on seeing Gorbachev in static terms, holding fast to principles that are locked into "the socialist choice made in 1917."

To the disciples of the "totalitarian model" and the spokesmen of the right, the events in the Soviet Union over the past few years, and especially since last summer, have conclusively demonstrated the wisdom of their theories and the bankruptcy of those of their critics. On the face of it, their argument seems to make sense: the Soviet system, once its foundations were shaken, began to erode and finally collapsed, with remarkable rapidity, with virtually no bloodshed, and, most important (as Malia points out in his last *Commentary* piece), in utter ignominy, "[leaving] behind no viable institutions for whatever government will inherit the rubble." Had any political cum ideological system ever proved so hollow and so brittle? And hasn't its spectacular demise proved that it had never been "reformable" or improvable?

The trouble with this proposition is, for one, that it stands truth on its head: for it isn't the evolutionists who, in Malia's words, were guilty of "our grim overestimation of the Soviet Union's prowess" but the writers and politicians besotten by fear of the "red menace" and "communist conspiracies." Indeed, in their lexicon any expression of doubt about the invincible might of the Soviet Union was close to treason.

Second, the stress on the unique character of the collapse of the Soviet empire (which, mirabile dictu, now illustrates how *weak* it was), also leaves something to be desired. The czarist empire, too, folded in a matter of a few days, in March 1917, and although it is true that unlike the Soviet system its collapse had been conditioned by military defeats, the principal reason for the disintegration of both empires was internal rot, the fact that their power and resilience were spent, and their legitimacy in the eyes of most of their subjects gone. For all the differences, the similarities between the period 1917–19 and the current one are extraordinary, chiefly in the explosion of ethnic conflicts and competing independence movements. The Kornilovs and Kolchaks are not likely to find their modern successors, but the old communist apparatchiks have already proved capable of defending the status quo ante, most successfully thus far in Central Asia and the Caucasus by donning the mantle of nationalism and xenophobia. True, the collapse of communism as such is indisputable. But then, czarism, too, left no visible institutions behind, which didn't prevent the new order from appropriating some of them in disguise.

The champions of the theory of "totalitarianism" to the contrary, the Soviet Union *had* changed, dramatically and significantly, after the death of Stalin, under Khrushchev, even under Brezhnev, and most saliently under Gorbachev. Indeed, if not for the changes initiated by Gorbachev, the August coup might

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well have succeeded, at least for a period of time. Though by 1990 it seemed more and more likely that the end was approaching, nothing in history is ever certain or preordained. Had the reforms been implemented more thoughtfully, or had their priorities been reversed (for instance, had economic changes preceded or at least accompanied political changes), they might well have succeeded. And had Gorbachev (as some had urged him to do) been more sensitive to the volatile nature of national aspirations, the USSR might not have collapsed, and the stage would not have been set (as it now has been) for dangerous conflicts and bloodshed.

The collapse of communism, therefore, hardly validates the "totalitarian" school. If anything, it suggests that the "evolutionists" had a much surer grasp of reality. For all the nonsense of some of the "revisionists" and the naive hopes of those who believed that change would inevitably lead to democracy (or socialism), the "mainstream" Sovietologists can be proud of having studied, traced and interpreted the most horrific chapter in the history of the twentieth century. □

Notes

[1] The words come from Raymond Aron's introduction to *The Soviet Syndrome* and paraphrase the views of the book's author, Alain Besançon (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976). I quote Aron with considerable dismay, for not only have I never considered him a spokesman of the conventional "right," but also because nearly twenty years earlier I published his essay "Soviet Society in Transition" (*Problems of Communism*, November–December 1957 and subsequently in A. Brumberg, ed., *Russia Under Khrushchev*, Praeger, 1962). In that essay Aron criticized the notion that the Soviet regime was "invulnerable to outside forces" as "an almost metaphysical interpretation of totalitarianism"—precisely the kind of interpretation offered by Besançon in 1976! ("The nature of the Soviet regime has not changed . . . since November 7, 1917. . . . What has changed is the USSR, which as a reality remains within history and keeps pace with it. But, having been based upon pseudo-reality, the regime as a result escapes history. Consequently it cannot be corrupted, for corruption is down-to-earth.") One can imagine what an agreeable chuckle these ruminations would have elicited from Leonid Brezhnev, that Soviet corruptor par excellence.

[2] In June 1991 I attended a meeting of liberal intellectuals in what was still called Leningrad. Vladimir Shlapentokh, a sociologist who emigrated to the United States in the 1970s, used this occasion to denounce nearly all Western Sovietologists (excepting Robert Conquest and Richard Pipes) as hopeless apologists. My angry rebuttal of Shlapentokh's remarks was seconded by many of those Soviets who attended the session.

[3] See, for instance, my introduction to *Chronicle of a Revolution*, Michael Walzer, "On Failed Totalitarianism" (*Dissent*, Summer 1983), and Irving Howe, "Totalitarianism Reconsidered" (*Dissent*, Winter 1991).

[4] Kirkpatrick subsequently shifted to asking "what can we do to help Gorbachev," and answering that we should support whatever policies he initiates that move society toward pluralism, democracy and economic progress. She still holds firmly to the applicability of her theory in other parts of the "totalitarian" world, including Nicaragua.

[5] "To the Stalin Mausoleum," originally published in *Daedalus* (January 1990), reprinted in *The Soviet System in Crisis*, ed. by Alexander Dallin and Gail Lapidus (Westview Press: 1991).

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Kay S. Hymowitz

SELF-ESTEEM & MULTICULTURALISM IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Whatever the outcome of the continuing debate over the Western tradition on college campuses, multiculturalism appears to have won an impressive victory in the public schools around the country. The list of urban school districts with programs in place or in the planning stage might surprise even its supporters, who once thought of themselves as beleaguered contenders: New York, Washington, Atlanta, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Detroit, Chicago, Rochester, Milwaukee, Indianapolis, Camden, Newark, Portland. Florida, Texas, and states not especially well known for ethnic diversity, such as Minnesota, Michigan, Iowa, and Maine, have joined ranks. The federal government has also lent its support to organizations that help develop multicultural curricula.

The premises behind public school reform don't differ all that much from those in the university debate: that knowledge cannot be separated from power or, more specifically, that the information traditionally offered students reflects the domination of white Anglo-European males; that the mind is inescapably restrained by cultural forces; and that the study of previously scorned or oppressed cultures will provide alternative and, by implication, corrective modes of thinking. Fueling acceptance of these premises are two dilemmas of particular concern to educators in the public schools: first, the extraordinary demographic changes that by the year 2000 will increase minorities to 30 percent of the public school population and that teachers all over the country are already witnessing and, second, the continued disappointing academic performance of disadvantaged minority children. Given the long history that places public education at the center of the American vision of genuine equality, the need for multicultural reform in the primary and secondary schools would seem to be pressing. But this also raises a clear and practical question: can multiculturalism, as now conceived, successfully educate children, especially those most in need of the egalitarian promise of our public schools?

Some of the practices of multiculturalists at first appear sensible and forward-looking, given the problems of an increasingly diverse society. Children are taught the destructive history of racial and ethnic prejudice. The values of the school, so vacantly neutral in past decades, become clearly grounded in tolerance and mutual respect. The "Anglo-European perspective" of traditional academic material is modified or, in some cases, completely scrapped. One group of multiculturalists, the Afrocentrists, has developed a curriculum centered on an African-American point of view. Another group, more in line with the precise meaning of the word "multiculturalism," offers academic material from multiple perspectives. In most instances, they categorize these perspectives—given some flexibility—as Native American, Asian, African, Hispanic, and European.

For many educators, the "gorgeous mosaic" of cultural diversity provides not just the decorative detail but the entire substructure of multicultural education. The celebratory "add-ons" of a decade ago such as Black History Month or Puerto Rican Day or even courses devoted to single-group studies are now

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scorned as a mere "tourist curriculum," to quote *The Anti-Bias Curriculum,* a publication of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Ideally, both multicultural factions want to reach children of all ages, from preschool until graduation, and to "infuse" all aspects of the curriculum—art, history, music, reading, writing, math, science, and indeed the total environment of the school—with the values of multiculturalism. In the humanities, this would have obvious results: students listen to music, read books, and use artistic methods from Africa, in the case of the Afrocentrists, or from a variety of cultures. In other courses, the infusion would be just as deep. In science, for instance, the "Portland Baseline Essays" series coordinated by Asa A. Hilliard, Jr., one of the primary spokesmen for Afrocentrism, suggests that in introducing the solar system to first graders one objective should be to describe the camera/spectrograph of Dr. George Carruthers, a black scientist. Some multiculturalists have proposed that word problems in math might not only be rewritten to include non-Anglo names but multicultural and socially relevant information; at one school children are taught to read graphs by comparing unemployment rates of black and white teenagers. Some educators are suggesting changes in the content of math and science. At a school in Sacramento, Hispanic students have been taught Mayan mathematics.

Central to the argument for courses of this sort is the idea of cultural self-esteem. The reason that minority children have not fared so well in the past, it is argued, is that the schools, like society as a whole, have been dominated by an Anglo-European cultural perspective. Americans whose ancestry is not European are ignored and denigrated by the dominant culture and as a result suffer from a poor self-image that impedes their motivation. It is assumed that if minority children are taught about their own culture the children will then feel a sense of pride—or self-esteem—that will in turn lead to greater academic success as well as greater personal authenticity. We can hear an echo of Rousseau and possibly Dewey here. Education must cultivate the child's natural self—read authentic ethnic identity—not constrain him or her in an artificial mold—read Anglo-European identity. When Iowa, surprisingly enough, became the first state in 1975 to mandate a "Multicultural, Nonsexist" education, it set the stage for what has now become educational dogma: "All students must be offered the opportunity to know their cultural heritage and appreciate its uniqueness." In other words, the schools must not merely respect but programatically encourage ethnic identity.

There are obvious practical problems when a child's cultural self-esteem is a precondition for learning. For one thing, teaching all students to appreciate their ancestry is a tall order in almost any state; in California, where the Board of Education services eighty-two different ethnic groups, or New York, where the number exceeds one hundred, such an approach to education tends to produce a Babel of bureaucratic directives. And naturally, if a fundamental purpose of schooling is to affirm ethnic identity and to "empower" each child according to her or his ancestry, parents are going to make sure that the schools are taking care of their own, thereby leading to a balkanization already decried by a number of critics. Packaging groups of people under labels that often feel arbitrary to the individuals involved only exacerbates this kind of tribalism. When multiculturalists group some minorities as Asian, for example, they open up a Pandora's box of Koreans, Japanese, Chinese, Thais, Indians, Filipinos, Laotians, and so forth. In a Queens, New York district with a large population of Koreans, parents were angered by a social studies unit on Asia that they felt paid inordinate attention to Japan. (Ironically, they were objecting to material that was already reformed in 1987 in order to provide a more global perspective.) In a similar sort of dispute, a number of Italian groups have protested the unperson status of Christopher Columbus in the current reforms. One of the central assumptions of the multiculturalists—that bias can be found in the information which is omitted as well as that which is openly voiced—appears to have come back to haunt them.

Still, these objections are more practical than programmatic since they fail to address the

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underlying sense of injustice that has led to the pedagogy of cultural self-esteem. It is the history of this injustice within American public schools that shapes some of the emotional background of multiculturalism. The great wave of Eastern and Southern European migration at the turn of the century and into the 1930s, for instance, yields plenty of stories of cruelty toward the bewildered greenhorn children who arrived at school doors: teachers who yelled "You dirty little Russian Jew!," who casually changed the names of children that they found too tiresome to pronounce, who insulted children for their eating habits, for not carrying handkerchiefs, for smelling bad. Stories like these loom large in the historical consciousness of reformers. At conferences on multicultural reform, Hispanic and Asian speakers frequently describe their own sense of loss and estrangement in American schools.

Equally important to the emotional background of multiculturalism are the accounts of racism, both blatant and neglectful, of the sort given in the late sixties by Jonathan Kozol in *Death at an Early Age* and Herbert Kohl in *Thirty-Six Children*. They describe teachers in ghetto schools who despised their young charges enough to call them black "animals" and who inspired so much defeatism as to ruin lives. Many educators feel that a more subtle bias continues to be manifested in, for instance, the disproportionate number of black and Hispanic children in "special education" classes. Hence, the destructive power of stereotyping is one of the central lessons of the multicultural classroom.

For the multiculturalists, self-esteem is a kind of counterstatement to racism and forced assimilation into a dominant culture. But while few would deny the destruction wrought on the psyches of children by racist educators, the role of the school in promoting assimilation, whether it be from a foreign culture or from an entrenched subculture, is a far more complicated matter than most multiculturalists have made it. True, in the early twentieth century the schools, particularly urban schools, were understood to be in part factories for turning "foreigners" into "Americans." Although it is unlikely that immigrant parents sought to have their native culture humiliated and shamed out of their children, they were undoubtedly seeking a foothold on the economic ladder and a bridge into a society that they found alien, as much for its diversity as for its Anglo-European ways. The schools were the only public agencies available to them.

Furthermore, it is questionable how much schools can do to assuage the sense of loss and estrangement that is an inevitable part of immigration. Eva Hoffman, in *Lost in Translation*, the story of her girlhood emigration from Poland and acculturation in America, titles the first section of her story "Paradise." The second section, her initial resettlement in Vancouver, which her description renders identical to a typical American suburb, is called "Exile." Her story reminds us of the exile's longing for the recollected smells, sights, language, and people—for home in the primal sense, the place of Wordsworthian memory. It also dramatizes the exile's confusion and paralysis as she is bombarded with what seem like chaotic fragments of strange information. One wonders how much this could have been diminished by a multicultural classroom. Could thirty strange-looking youngsters speaking in a strange language about the virtues of ethnic pluralism or even Polish customs and traditions really have allowed her to feel less fragmented?

Immigrant stories usually reveal that it is not self-hatred that leads the child to embrace American culture but rather the longing for a state of "ordinary reality," as Hoffman calls it, and a relief from bivalence, as well as the inevitable youthful desire for conformity. Many immigrant children were renamed by teachers too lazy and insensitive to learn how to pronounce given names, but many immigrant children chose to rename themselves, hoping to refashion themselves into a new identity consistent with a new reality. *Small Victories*, Samuel Freedman's account of a year in the life of an English teacher and her students in a decayed New York City high school, recounts the stories of a number of immigrant students who sought this normalcy in their lives. One of them, See Wal, the child of impoverished Chinese peasants so poor as to be unable to send their child to a free school in China

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because they could not afford the required books, responds intuitively to *The Great Gatsby* because he sees a soul mate in the self-invented Jay Gatsby, despite his wealth and upper crust manners. According to Jessica Seigel, the boy's teacher and the heroic subject of Freedman's book, many other immigrant children have done the same.

The gradual assimilation of a new "American" identity does indeed require change and loss. The self that was, writes Hoffman, becomes "lost in translation." Effective schooling accelerates this. As a child learns to use her mind in new ways, she will find herself unalterably changed and inevitably estranged from her own foreign-born family. (One account of Polish immigrants is entitled "My Children Did Not Know Me.") And the road that needs to be traveled by an uneducated black would seem to be no less far. By seeing the effects of education as a kind of "colonialism" forced on the vanquished by the victors and insisting that children do not need to change as a result of schooling, multiculturalists, like many Americans, deny the transforming power of intellectual growth. By contrast, Richard Rodriguez attests to this power throughout his elegiac *Hunger of Memory*. He maintains his connection to his culture and family during his metamorphosis from a working-class Mexican child into a middle-class American, but the nature of the connection is utterly changed:

> My need to think so much and so abstractly about my parents and our relationship was in itself an indication of my long education. My father and mother did not pass their time thinking about the cultural meanings of their experience. It was I who described their daily lives with airy ideas. And yet *positively*: . . . if, because of my schooling, I had grown culturally separated from my parents, my education finally had given me ways of speaking and caring about that fact.

It's not surprising that multiculturalists are forced to deny this kind of hard-won pride felt by the successful—wholly or partly—assimilated man or woman. Yet this pride and the sense of worthwhile change might provide helpful reassurance to children who may intuit, unlike their teachers, the danger of their separateness. "If I rehearse here the changes in my private life after my Americanization, it is finally to emphasize the gain," writes Rodriguez. "The loss implies the gain. . . ."

Difficult truths like these do not come easily to educators who need to rely on quick-fix gimmicks to win grants and capture the attention of bureaucratic superiors. Thus, they tend to simplify the power of cultural identity: teach the children their own culture and they do not have to lose it; teach them other cultures and they will respect them. If only it were that simple! "Culture penetrates to the roots of [the] nervous system," writes Edward T. Hall in *The Hidden Dimension*. Facial expressions like smiling, frowning, and winking; rhythms of speech; the way we stand, sit, or make eye contact—all of our tiny, unconscious, communicative signs—are culturally distinctive. More important, they are not idiosyncratic tics, detachable from the feelings they signal. Rather, they are all part of the shared, subliminal perception of the universe which we call culture. Hall notes one example of cultural difference that he himself, an experienced anthropologist, took some time to uncover. Arabs tend to stand very close to other people. This is not merely a different "custom," he points out, but rather an expression of a notion of individuality, of privacy, of the location of the ego that is quite at odds with the experience of most Americans.

How much of this can we expect a child to understand? Knowing the values, beliefs, history, and contributions of other cultures is supposed to lead to increased tolerance. Yet these categories, as Hall's example should make clear, do little to help a child empathize with the lived experience of a culturally alien "other." One could argue, of course, that children do not need to absorb the hidden and involuntary assumptions of a culture in order to learn some degree of tolerance or self-esteem. Perhaps; but these hidden, involuntary assumptions remind us to question the cultural innocence of the multicultural enterprise itself.

By reducing cultural difference to easily taught categories, multiculturalists can persuade themselves of their own objectivity and tolerance. In fact, their program is suffused

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with cultural bias and unwittingly demands its own sort of assimilation. "Perez y Martina," a folktale commonly taught as an example of Puerto Rican culture, poses exactly this sort of dilemma. Martina, the heroine of the story, is a lovely cockroach who finds a lucky coin and wishes for a new dress and face powder. She is courted by a handsome frog and a duck and is finally landed by Perez, a gallant mouse. It's a charming and evidently beloved story in Puerto Rico, but by contemporary American standards, the gender roles are stereotyped—and stereotypes are of deep concern to multiculturalists.

Yet in worrying over whether Martina is a stereotype, as some multiculturalists do, they reveal more about our own culture's expectations for women than they do about an alien culture's traditions. The minority girl who grows up in a home where women are groomed to marry young and nurture children and where men are expected to enjoy the freedom of the public world will hardly find cultural affirmation in a classroom that calls these things into question. Indeed, she will be faced with the enduring dilemma of the immigrant: she can remain true to her culture or she can adopt the values of the school and the larger society; that is, she can assimilate. She cannot keep her cultural integrity and readily adopt the idea of equality between the sexes. In doing so, she lifts the veil on myriad other cultural assumptions that touch on it: the value of work in shaping identity, the relative independence of the American child, the possibility of social mobility and a fuller individuality.

Similarly, self-esteem, the foundation of the entire theory, is a version of American therapeutic "expressive individualism," described in *Habits of the Heart* (by Robert Bellah et al.). The therapeutic attitude rests on the idea that "the individual must find and assert his or her true self" aside from "constraints of social roles." A Japanese family, more familiar with a mode of feeling characterized by the saying "The nail which is sticking up must be hammered down" is likely to find self-esteem an utterly alien idea.

In their acceptance of the American premise that education is the path toward social equality, multiculturalists also promote a unicultural idea related to American individualism. In more tightly status-bound societies, education hardly holds the promise of a better life. For southern Italian peasants, Nathan Glazer says in *Beyond the Melting Pot*, "one improved one's circumstances by hard work, perhaps by a lucky strike, but not by spending time in a school, taught by women, who didn't even beat the children." (Not surprisingly, children of southern Italian ancestry have not fared as well in American schools as Jewish or Chinese children.) Yet any decent American teacher must believe in the democratic goals of education and has every right to insist on her students' assimilation in this regard. This is the very battle waged by educators in inner-city schools where some black students see hard-working, aspiring peers as "acting white."

"People cannot act or interact at all in any meaningful way," writes Hall, "except through the medium of culture," and people in the multicultural classroom appear to be no exception. As he confronts his students, a teacher is invisibly tied in a net of cultural assumptions about the purpose of education, the proper relationship between teacher and student, the nature of childhood, the interiority of the individual. He dramatizes his cultural identity in virtually everything he does: how often he smiles at a student, whether he bends down when speaking to a child, the amount of freedom children have in their assignments, to speak out in class, or even to choose their own color crayon. There are things a sensitive teacher can do to lessen the distance between himself or herself as an inevitable representative of mainstream culture and a child at odds with that culture, as Freedman's *Small Victories* and Tracy Kidder's moving *Among Schoolchildren* demonstrate; but in the end, if education is to lead a child successfully into the world, the teacher must first draw children inside this cultural net.

Instead, by trivializing the power of culture to determine the shape of experience, the pedagogy of self-esteem sentimentalizes the lives of children growing up outside the American mainstream. The dilemmas of the poor and the foreign are wrapped in a colorful

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package of cultural pride, thereby reinforcing their separateness, which education, the path into mainstream society, should help to diminish. Hannah Arendt observed more than thirty years ago the tendency of American schools to erect a "miniature model" of a new world that is then expected "to go on developing naturally and automatically like the children themselves." Multiculturalists seem also to envision the schools not as a bridge to a common society in which for better or worse children will eventually have to work and live but as a place where a fairer and more diverse order will be magically constructed. In one preschool outside Cleveland, for instance, black children are placed in groups named for various African tribes and, because of the tradition of the extended family in Africa, are taught by a group of four teachers. Halloween has been replaced by Africa Day, Thanksgiving becomes Family Day, and so forth. Rather than acknowledging the compromises and hard work that are the cost of a satisfying place in the world, schemes like this imply that the world will easily conform to the child and his or her own cultural assertions. The school provides a miniature model of a world that doesn't exist. Likewise, in Sacramento, young black males have been taught through the "African Mind Model Technique." In New York, where the State Board of Regents has published a pamphlet saying that black children have a "tendency to approximate space, number and time, instead of aiming for complete accuracy," educators are looking for relevant approaches. But where in a Western economy will someone with a tendency to the approximate find a job?

In addition to promoting skills of limited usefulness, self-esteem, predicated as it is on a search for cultural pride, tends to serve up a simmering stew of half-truths. In New York State, for instance, students are taught the major influences on the United States Constitution: the European Enlightenment and the Iroquois political system. Afrocentrists sometimes suggest, based on the flimsiest of evidence, that Africans arrived in America centuries before Columbus and that a black man was instrumental in the invention of the telephone. Leaving aside the question of whether such information is really a precondition for self-confidence, it seems likely that children filled with "facts" that find little assent or awareness in the wider society may well find themselves unemployable—and resentful.

There are other reasons to believe that cultural self-esteem may undermine rather than promote effective intellectual achievement. Once mental health becomes a central concern, a teacher can neglect a child's intellectual growth for the most virtuous of reasons—because she cares. In the Brooklyn, New York, school attended by my own children, a fifth grade teacher was asked by a parent why her child was not being assigned more homework. The teacher replied: "Long after the children have forgotten the major exports of Chile or the location of Honduras, they will remember how respectfully I treated them." Indeed, how does a teacher grade a child's autobiography, a perennial assignment in multicultural classrooms, when it tells a story of racial pain or immigrant loss? And with such stories fresh in his or her mind, how does the teacher apply tough standards in grading subsequent assignments?

Of course, the American public schools have long been a breeding ground for anti-intellectualism of this sort, as Richard Hofstadter has shown. Frances Fitzgerald, in *America Revised,* describes a puritanical and fundamentalist strain in much progressive educational reform. And despite the sophistication implied by its name, multiculturalism also displays a familiar American provincialism. Every book is examined through the lens of a few contemporary adult concerns. The Iowa Board of Education suggests, for example, that students be assigned a book to review for gender bias. Should teachers choose to teach *Huckleberry Finn,* they must dwell on its racism. Shakespeare's plays are assigned not for the beauty of their language, or for study of the nature of love or evil, but as cadavers to be dissected for lesions of sexism. Even very young children must sublimate fantasy and imagination to the stern, higher task: learning about unfamiliar "life-styles." "Teachers need to develop a classroom library that provides a balanced representation of diverse physical

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characteristics and lifestyles, levels of affluence and social values," writes Patricia Ramsey, professor of child psychology at Mount Holyoke College, in her book *Teaching and Learning in a Diverse World*.

The very children who are in most need of inspiration—those for whom books are foreign—can only respond to such a bureaucratic and lifeless view of books with indifference. Nor can such approaches inculcate the analytic skills desperately needed by this generation of students: the vocabulary and categories of analysis—bias, stereotype, oppression—are too narrow for that. Instead of allowing books to enlarge children's mental categories, multiculturalism insists on confining potentially flexible minds in a straitjacket of socially useful terminology. Furthermore, the mind-numbing series of pamphlets, worksheets, self-evaluation forms, mandates, book lists, goal descriptions, and evaluations of administrators, teachers, and other staff—I received a three-inch-thick packet of these from Iowa when I requested information on their multicultural program—does little to inspire creative teaching and much to empower stultifying educational bureaucracies.

"A major goal of multicultural education is to improve academic achievement," writes James Banks, a statement endorsed by virtually all reformers. But one has the feeling in reading their books, listening to their speeches, and sitting in their classrooms, that they are really seeking to short-circuit the democratic ideal of education. Instead of offering disadvantaged children an education that would promote social mobility within American society, they would indoctrinate—it's difficult to avoid this word—them with feelings of self-worth and a belief in pluralism in preparation for an imagined new world. Nowhere in the substantial literature of multiculturalism are there recommendations for serious courses in geography, foreign languages, anthropology, or comparative religion—subjects that might encourage both genuine intellectual achievement and thinking about cultural difference.

The future of a disadvantaged child nurtured on multiculturalism and self-esteem is a hazy one. Even though self-esteem appears in part designed to foster a wider sense of possibility—"You can be what you wanna be," promise the heroic stories of minority men and women—the quintessential question of the individualistic American childhood—"What do you want to be when you grow up?"—is not likely to find satisfying answers in these classrooms. Shelby Steele, who in *The Content of Our Character* writes gratefully of the black power movement for helping him to face racism squarely, found that in the end it "did not offer much of a blueprint on how to move my life forward. Despite the strong feelings that it had given me a crucial part of myself, it told me virtually nothing about who I was as an individual or how I might live in the world as myself." Likewise, the multicultural student is encouraged to feel unique but to locate his uniqueness in his ethnic identity, that is to say, a collective identity. This collective identity, while of deep significance to many Americans, still offers a child no sense of future direction and, given its sentimental packaging, little realistic promise of community. In other words, cultural self-esteem promotes both an inadequate individuality *and* an inadequate collectivity.

One positive development has come out of the debate over multiculturalism: the recognition that American children need a more sophisticated and richer introduction to history. Some of the current reforms in California, where students are now required to study three years of world history and three years of American history, with greater attention paid to minority experience, look promising. Yet the 90 percent nonwhite Oakland school district has rejected the new textbooks for this curriculum for not going far enough. The administrators and teachers of Oakland have won for their students the only sort of Pyrrhic victory possible when the battle for educational reform is cast in terms of self-esteem; many Oakland students are studying history this year without textbooks. □

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Edited by Nicolaus Mills

LABOR'S FUTURE?

In the new television series "Sisters," one of the main characters spends most of his time around the house in his bathrobe. He is not sick. He is not crazy. He is unemployed.

Years ago, we would have imagined Archie Bunker, not a suburbanite with a wife and a car and two children, in such a situation. But today none of the old rules apply, even on television. To talk about work in the 1990s is to talk about worklessness and a labor force in which blue-collar and white-collar workers find themselves in constant peril—as likely to be fired because of a new computer as because of a steel plant in Korea.

Never in the last quarter century has labor so needed allies. Yet never has it been more fashionable to criticize labor. Among the young, this is especially true. Who these days finishes college and wants to be a labor reporter or a labor lawyer, let alone a labor organizer? It is no accident that the kind of worker who gets the most attention from the press is someone like Ben Hamper, the ex-auto worker, who in his best-selling *Rivethead* stories describes life on the assembly line as a hell in which neither management nor union officials do anything to relieve the agony. Hamper provides the perfect excuse for those (especially on the left) who suspect labor is a lost cause to abandon it.

This special issue of *Dissent* is not so politically correct that it avoids criticizing labor and its leaders. Indeed, the essays that follow here overflow with suggestions on what unions might do to cope with the changing American work force and economy. But what characterizes these essays is the very opposite of the kind of "well-intentioned" criticism that would scapegoat labor for labor's problems.

The workers described in these pages are neither proletarian heroes nor hapless victims. They are more complex and diverse than that. Above all, they are men and women who by their long-term commitment to a job, a neighborhood, their child's school, have more at stake in the stability and competitiveness of the American economy than most corporate heads. For them, it is a steady salary that will pay the bills, not a sudden takeover or a spectacular quarterly profit.

Underlying these essays is thus the larger assumption that the catastrophes—from deindustrialization to Reaganomics—that have befallen labor over the last twenty-five years are problems that engage us all. If some of these problems can be solved with tougher strikes and better organizing, most cannot. They require political solutions as momentous as those responsible for the New Deal of the 1930s. And they require a popular culture in which the need for such solutions is taken seriously.—N.M.

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David Brody

THE BREAKDOWN OF LABOR'S SOCIAL CONTRACT

Historical Reflections, Future Prospects

In 1950 John L. Lewis, head of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), and leading operators representing the entire soft-coal industry negotiated the first National Bituminous Wage Agreement. It was a triumphant moment for Lewis, culminating an entire career of dogged effort at constructing a collective-bargaining system that would stabilize the cutthroat soft-coal industry. With the formation, after the 1950 agreement, of the Bituminous Coal Operators Association (BCOA), Lewis had the industrial partner he ardently desired. For the next decade, the BCOA-UMWA agreement worked as Lewis had intended. Although production declined by 20 percent, coal prices remained stable. Wages rose from $14.75 a day in 1950 to $24.25 in 1958, and royalty payments of 40 cents per ton financed a generous welfare-and-retirement fund. The high-wage structure stimulated the mechanization Lewis had long championed. Output per miner jumped from 6.77 to 12.83 tons during the decade, so that, despite steeply rising wages, labor costs actually fell by 8 percent. Economists estimated that the union impact on wages—the 30 percent of earnings beyond what the labor market for miners would have commanded—exceeded that of any other basic industry.

The BCOA-UMWA agreement was emblematic, if in exaggerated form, of the industry-wide bargaining systems that took wages out of competition, linked rising earnings to productivity gains, and integrated collective bargaining into the regulated national markets of postwar American capitalism. "An astonishing degree of unanimity in our judgment of industrial relations" now existed, remarked the Cornell scholar George Brooks at a 1961 symposium. "Almost all the articulate members of the community now accept the same objectives in industrial relations, variously called maturity, industrial stability, responsibility, or statesmanship." This consensus, in turn, signified an enduring social contract between labor, capital, and the state that at long last put behind the country a century of endemic industrial strife. Brooks's conclusion was very like Francis Fukuyama's famous response to the end of the cold war in our own time: the triumph of the postwar settlement meant the end of labor history. To see what actually happened let us return to the coal industry.

No sooner had Lewis retired in 1960 than the economic underpinnings of his grand strategy started to unravel. After half a century of secular decline, the demand for coal began to rise, but almost exclusively from the electric utilities, which were consuming 80 percent of output by 1980. The structure of the industry was transformed by the entry of conglomerates: by 1976, only three of the forty largest coal producers remained under independent management. And, in the strip-mining fields of the west that produced a quarter of the nation's coal by 1980, there was a new and potent nonunion sector to contend with. As an economic regulator—a mechanism for stabilizing a highly competitive, overdeveloped

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industry—the BCOA-UMWA agreement had effectively been superseded. On top of this came a crisis over productivity, induced by the clash between union work rules rooted in the premechanization era and the rationalizing demands of an increasingly capital-intensive industry. Amid widespread workplace strife, output per worker in the underground mines plunged during the 1970s.

The best union leadership in the world would have been pressed to manage these problems. Under Lewis's incompetent successors, beginning with the corrupt Tony Boyle, the UMWA never had a chance. The BCOA-UMWA structure still exists, but, with only twenty signatories to the 1988 contract, scarcely matters for the industry. Once almost fully organized, the UMWA represents fewer than 15 percent of the nation's miners, and, despite Richard Trumka's robust leadership and the courage of the Pittston strikers, today faces a bleak future.

In its decline, as in its moment of collective-bargaining triumph, the Mine Workers Union is emblematic—again, to an exaggerated degree—of what has happened to the labor movement in recent years. As in coal mining, transforming changes have everywhere swept across the economic landscape. In some industries, as in communications, the airlines, and trucking, labor's problems stemmed from government deregulation; in others, as in autos, steel, clothing, and shoes, from foreign competition; and elsewhere, from construction to retailing, from a host of other destabilizing market and technological changes. Whatever the particularities, the recent economic revolution has been remarkably consistent in its impact on the labor movement: in the private sector, collective-bargaining systems are everywhere under siege, and anti-unionism is resurgent. The social contract of the postwar era is, for practical purposes, dead.

Individual unions have responded with varying degrees of flexibility and resourcefulness. The performance of the Mine Workers by no means represents the norm. But even the most inventive of unions—for example, the Steelworkers in the face of its industry's extraordinary collapse in the early 1980s—could not prevent the deep erosion of their membership bases. The Steelworkers emerged with its union-management relations largely intact, but with a membership cut in half: in basic steel, production jobs shrank from half a million in 1975 to 120,000 in 1990.

The depth of labor's crisis is best captured in the numbers. In 1970, membership in the private sector stood at an all-time high of seventeen million. That translated into a union density of 29.1 percent, down only by six points from the peak of 35.7 percent in 1953. By the mid 1980s, union density in the private sector had fallen to roughly 17 percent, and membership was down by five million from the 1970 high mark. Today, union representation in the private sector stands at 12 percent. But for union successes in the public sector, a phenomenon that began in the 1960s, the labor movement would be down perilously close to pre–New Deal levels.

In accounting for this calamitous decline, my premise is that the operative forces are economic. In the American case that is an unarguable truth. But there is no automatic or universal translation of market competition and structural change into trade-union decline. What is happening in the United States is after all part of a global phenomenon, affecting, if not necessarily to the same degree or in precisely the same ways, the labor markets of all the advanced industrial economies. Indeed, if one credits the influential argument of the *Régulation* school of French political economy, a new stage of late capitalism has set in worldwide, displacing the regulated national economies of the postwar era with a global economic order characterized by capital mobility and competitive labor markets.

Yet no other labor movement has been so hard hit as the American by these global developments—at least, as reflected in the numbers. Of fifteen industrialized countries, only in three others did the percentage of organized workers actually fall between 1970 and 1985–86, and nowhere with anything like the magnitude of the American decline. In 1970, the United States was at the bottom end of the scale, but it shared the 30–39 percent decile with six other countries. At 17 percent in

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1985–86, it stood in a class by itself, eleven points behind the next most laggard movement.

Consider, moreover, the diverging fates of Canadian and U.S. unionism in these years. No two movements could have been more alike in institutional makeup and historical experience. The early and persistent tendency of Canadian local unions to affiliate with the emerging national trade unions south of the border—not the contrary impulses of Canadian nationalism—was the determining fact in the evolution of Canadian unionism. The decisive moment came in 1902, when the Trades and Labour Congress (TLC—the Canadian counterpart to the American Federation of Labor) expelled the Knights of Labor bodies and adopted the AFL principle of opposition to dual unionism, thereby granting the Canadian branches of the U.S. internationals a virtual monopoly over trade-union representation in the TLC. It became, in effect, the Canadian wing of the American movement. And thereafter, with certain deviations, the two movements came close to having a unitary institutional history, with the Canadians generally marching a half step to the rear. There was the same split over industrial unionism in the 1930s, a Canadian version of the Wagner Act in 1944, anticommunist purges in 1949–50, and, in the wake of AFL-CIO reunification in 1955, the Canadian Labour Congress the next year. At that time, 70 percent of all organized workers in Canada belonged to AFL-CIO unions. The 1950s marked the apex of the historic tendency toward an integrated North American labor movement.

That tendency no longer governs. From the 1960s onward, the Canadian unions entered a period of sustained growth, more than doubling their membership in twenty years and, by the early 1980s, boasting a unionized sector approaching 40 percent—this in stark contrast to the devastating spiral below 20 percent in the United States. The historic linkages between the two movements are disintegrating. Increasingly, the Canadian branches have been inclined to go their own way, either by asserting more autonomy or, like the Canadian Auto Workers in 1984, by declaring their independence. A dwindling share of the Canadian movement—35 percent or less by the late 1980s—retains ties to the AFL-CIO, and the sense that the Canadian movement has a separate destiny is palpable. The Canadian Auto Workers split off from the UAW citing the responsibility that they had "to play a lead role" in fulfilling "a Canadian labour movement programme."[1]

How are we to account for this remarkable divergence of institutional fortunes? For auto, an economic explanation might suffice. The Canadian industry boomed after the 1982 recession. With output and employment on the rise—the Canadian share of North American production expanded by 25 percent during the decade—Canadian auto workers were spared the plant closings and draconian cost-cutting demands confronting their U.S. brothers and sisters. The vaunted Canadian militancy against concessions was well grounded in a markedly more favorable bargaining environment. But for Canada as a whole that was decidedly not the case. Since 1973, manufacturing productivity has increased even more slowly than in the United States, the unemployment rate has run almost consistently higher during the 1980s (it currently stands at 10 percent), and, as in the United States, the downward pressure on wages has been (in the words of the Canadian scholar Daniel Drache) "far-reaching and broad-based." It cannot be said that the economic environment for collective bargaining is more favorable in Canada than in the United States.

What has become more favorable is, in the broadest sense, political. In the United States, the legal framework for collective bargaining has deeply eroded since the days of the Wagner Act. Employers today feel free to thwart unionization and, perhaps even more important in the current economic climate, to break out of established contractual relations—hence the current eagerness of the AFL-CIO for legislation prohibiting the permanent replacement of strikers. It signifies the political weakness of organized labor that this modest strengthening of union protections stands so little chance of passage.

In Canada, on the other hand, the collective bargaining process is closely regulated by conciliation requirements, strike votes, and prohibitions against stoppages during the life of

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contracts (with mandatory arbitration of grievances required). In flush times, these state restraints might seem burdensome (in practice, of course, they become incorporated into the bargaining stategy of the parties) but, under adverse conditions, they preserve the collective bargaining process itself. The rights of workers to organize and bargain collectively are much more effectively protected under Canadian law because of swift certification procedures and the mandatory signing of first agreements. And in a variety of ways—in the agency-shop requirements in the major provinces (as compared to the right-to-work laws in many states) and in limitations on the freedom of employers to move from unionized sites—Canadian law signals the legitimacy of collective bargaining. This is reflected in the bargaining rights granted public employees, who are organized at twice the U.S. rate and are identified with the militant wing of the Canadian movement. In Canada corporate employers—even those with nasty records south of the border—do not sing the praises of a union-free environment, and, of course, there is no Canadian counterpart to the action by the Reagan administration breaking the strike of air traffic controllers in 1981. There has emerged what the Canadian scholar Christopher Huxley and his associates have called a distinctively Canadian "labor regime."

By way of explanation, the sociologist Seymour Lipset and others point to collectivist values inhering in the Canadian political culture that accord legitimacy to the labor movement and shelter it from the market-driven anti-unionism rampant in the United States. There is much to be said for this as a basic explanation, but the fact is that although Canadian statist tendencies go far back (for example, to MacKenzie King's Industrial Disputes Investigative Act of 1907), the legal and political climate was no more favorable to trade unionism, nor was the unionized sector larger, in Canada than in the United States up to quite recent times. The catalytic element sparking Canada's modern "labor regime" is to be found in the country's changing party system and in a new path taken by Canadian labor. In the 1960s, a political divergence occurred no less remarkable than the divergence in the institutional fortunes of the two movements.

The AFL-CIO remained steadfastly nonpartisan, although, as compared to the old AFL, with far more potent force and in firm alliance with the Democratic party. In Canada, on the other hand, the two-party system itself came under attack, initially by the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in the western provinces and then more decisively with the formation of the New Democratic party (NDP) in 1961. Canadian labor threw off the nonpartisanship fostered by the AFL-CIO linkage and entered into a robust social-democratic third-party politics. As the NDP made headway—its progress capped by the capture of Ontario in the 1990 elections—Canadian unionism not only gained political muscle but increasingly became a progressive force in the nation's political life. It assumed the mantle of what the Canadian scholar Pradeep Kumar calls "social unionism." In the meanwhile, the AFL-CIO fell on hard political times, becoming more marginal to electoral politics after the collapse of the Johnson administration in 1968 and reduced increasingly to fighting for its own sectional interests rather than for the larger social-justice objectives that since the New Deal had animated labor's legislative agenda. This is "the most striking difference," remark Huxley and his associates in the essay referred to earlier—"the increasing importance of more adversarial and political unionism in Canada, marked above all by the interdependence and mutual aid between key unions and the New Democratic party, and analogous developments in Quebec."

Are we to conclude that U.S. labor took a historic misstep, and should have followed the Canadian example? By no means. The more apt historical question runs the other way: why was Canadian labor so long in finding the empowering political role it currently enjoys? The comparative history in which I have indulged does pose an inescapable question on the American side: what was there about the nation's politics that denied such an empowering role to U.S. labor? But, inviting as that question is, it is not one that can be pursued in

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this essay.[2] If we can agree that, at least after the triumph of the New Deal, the fundamental conditions of American politics did preclude the Canadian option, that will suffice for my purposes. For what I want to argue is that American labor's recent decline should not be seen as a contingent event, one that, with better leaders or better policies, might have turned out differently, but rather that, given the changes in the U.S. economy, its decline was historically determined. In short: no other labor movement stands so exposed to the forces of its economic environment.

The Canadian comparison suggests the insulating powers of a more favorable political culture. But it does not explain how, in the absence of such a culture, the American movement made headway in the past. So, in thinking about prospects for its future recovery, we have to turn to the best historical instance we have of how trade unionism has triumphed in the American environment—the 1930s.

In 1929, organized labor was an arrested movement. In the areas of its historical strength—construction, mining, and transportation—it represented in the range of 25 to 30 percent of eligible workers. The modern movement represents roughly the same proportion of workers in the sectors of its historical strength (that is, as of 1950). At both moments, the crisis confronting the labor movement came not primarily from these mature sectors, which, even totally organized, could by themselves not have sustained a robust national movement, but from the dynamic new sectors of economic growth seemingly beyond the reach of trade unionism. In 1929, of course, the dynamic core was the technologically advanced mass-production industries. Today it is the white-collar consumer and business services.

It would be hard to say whether the changing complexion of the modern movement, which is already more than half white-collar, gives it any relative advantage over the 1929 movement, where the craft/industrial mix had shifted much less—only a quarter of the organized came from the manufacturing sector—but also with class barriers not so distinct between the organized and unorganized. No one would argue, however, that the obstacles facing organized labor seemed any less daunting in 1929 than they do today. There are, too, quite striking parallels in how the labor movement responded to adversity. In politics, for example, there were comparably desperate initiatives: the abortive entry into the Democratic nominating process in 1984 has a counterpart in the farmer-labor insurgency within the party primaries that petered out in LaFollette's Progressive ticket of 1924. And there was an eerily familiar retreat in the 1920s from adversial unionism, evident not only in the sharp decline in strike activity but more significantly in the AFL's conversion to cooperative labor-management relations. In the context of the mass-production systems at the cutting edge sixty years ago, the efforts of organized labor to jump on board bear a striking similarity to the anxious receptivity of today's trade unions toward a more flexible and mutualistic system of labor relations. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad had very much the same cachet for the 1920s that GM's NUMMI plant has today.

The breakthrough of the 1930s, of course, came from an entirely different direction. With the onset of the Great Depression, the balance of forces in the United States shifted dramatically. The elemental events were, first, the rise of the New Deal and, second, the rebellion of the industrial workers. From these events there issued the particular conditions making possible the unionization of the mass-production sector. First, the state began to protect the rights of workers to organize and engage in collective bargaining, initially under Section 7a of the National Industrial Recovery Act (1933) and then decisively with the passage of the Wagner Act (1935). Employers were deprived of the enormous power advantage they had long enjoyed in the struggle over collective bargaining.

At the same time, the New Deal moved to mitigate the market pressures that had driven their anti-unionism. Section 7a was part of the industrial recovery legislation that, through codes of fair competition, enabled industries to cartelize their depression-ridden markets. The exchange was entirely deliberate—representational rights for workers as a price for market

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controls for industry. This key linkage survived the early demise of the National Industrial Recovery Act. The Wagner Act contained an explicit economic rationale: collective bargaining would give rise to the mass purchasing power necessary for sustained economic growth. This, in turn, prefigured the Keynesian economic policy that underwrote the New Deal collective bargaining system. With macroeconomic policy (as specified by the Employment Act of 1946) responsible for long-term demand and price competition firmly controlled by the restored oligipolistic structures or, as in the transport and communications sectors, by direct state regulation, the market-driven basis for American anti-unionism had seemingly run its course after World War II.

Much the same could be said for the labor-process sources of anti-unionism. The crisis over job control touched off by Taylorism had passed by the 1930s. In the mass-production sector, the question was no longer whether managers had the authority, but only how they exercised it. There were, moreover, compelling reasons, almost systemic in nature, for the formalization of work rules. Where tasks were subdivided and precisely defined, for example, job classification necessarily followed and, from that, the principle of pay equity. Time-and-motion study meant objective—that is, testable—standards for the pace of work. Internal labor markets implied uniform rules governing layoff, recall, and even promotion. Corporate commitment to this formalized system was imperfect, however, and broke down entirely in the early years of the Great Depression.

Rank-and-file fury over job insecurity and intolerable speed-up forced management's hand during the NRA period. Between 1933 and 1936—*before* collective bargaining began—all the elements of the modern workplace regime were more or less in place: specified, uniform rights for workers (beginning with seniority and pay equity); a formal procedure for adjudicating grievances arising from those rights; and a structure of shop-floor representation to implement the grievance procedure. Corporate employers would have much preferred to operate this regime under nonunion conditions. Indeed, it had taken shape in the course of their efforts to implant the employee representation plans (that is, company unions) that employers hoped would satisfy the requirements of New Deal labor policy. But when that strategy failed, they were prepared to have the workplace regime incorporated into contractual relations with independent unions under the terms of the Wagner Act.

Thus there emerged the key elements—the legal framework, the market regulation, an agreed-upon workplace regime—buttressing the modern collective-bargaining system. It is, of course, the breakdown of these sustaining elements that accounts for labor's recent decline. By the same token, something like them in new forms will have to take shape to bring into being the next expansionist period.

But what does the history I have described say about the labor movement as the agent of its own revival? It was a bystander in the cataclysmic economic collapse that set things in motion and a very minor player in the emergence of the New Deal and upsurge of rank-and-file militancy. Nor was it ever in a position to make or break the key developments in law, economic policy, or workplace relations on which labor's future depended. The AFL never had the power to shape the environment within which it operated. But what it did have was an acute and true sense of what, as a job-conscious labor movement, it wanted from that environment. That may sound like an odd claim, given the notorious failure of the AFL to surmount the jurisdictional impasse over industrial unionism that split the movement in 1935. But, at a more fundamental level, the labor movement—both the AFL and CIO wings—was unerring and, at the critical junctures, astonishingly successful in advancing its trade-union interests.

This is best observed in the battle over New Deal collective bargaining policy. What was at issue, once Section 7a was adopted, was really a competition between rival conceptions of labor organization. Corporate employers argued that labor's rights could be fulfilled through employee representation plans (ERPs), that is, by a system of works councils. In resisting that claim, the AFL faced a hard,

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uphill struggle. For one thing, corporate industry seized the initiative, put the ERPs into place unilaterally in 1933, and thereafter largely defined the terms of the debate. The AFL never had the power during the NRA period to impose collective bargaining on unwilling employers. Nor was much help forthcoming from the New Deal. The ERP scheme, as it evolved from its transparently cynical beginnings, became attractive to many in the administration, including Roosevelt himself, as an alternative to collective bargaining.

What the AFL had on its side, in the long, dispiriting battle over Section 7a, was an absolutely clear and unwavering conception of what it wanted: a system of state regulation that conformed to its conception of collective bargaining through trade-union representation. And through the Wagner Act, against all odds, the labor movement prevailed. Everything in the law's provisions was keyed to promoting collective bargaining: majority rule in the selection of bargaining agents; exclusive representation by the certified bargaining agents; the obligation of good-faith bargaining imposed on employers; labor's right to strike specifically guaranteed. Yet, despite its far reach, the law was specifically circumscribed, setting collective bargaining in motion but leaving the process itself within the realm of contractual freedom. A voluntaristic labor movement would not have had it otherwise. Never mind that in later years a darker side to the law would be revealed and the wisdom of departing from Gompers's anti-statist principles called into question. At the time, the Wagner Act represented a remarkable triumph for American trade unionism.

The rise of industrial unionism enables us to identify the enduring historical determinants of the fate of organized labor in the American environment. The essential developments at the time in politics, market structure, and workplace relations have to be taken as autonomous events. Yes, the labor movement played a role; it joined the New Deal, advocated market regulation, participated in the workplace struggles of 1933–36; in any proper history, all this would have to be fully explicated.

But these transforming events were not of labor's making. Nor can we expect that they will be when—if—another historic moment like the 1930s arrives. What we can hope is that the labor movement will know how to seize that moment, and that depends, as it did in the 1930s, on a sure sense of its job-conscious character.

Back in the darkest days of the 1982 recession, the business analyst Peter Drucker wrote a column for the *Wall Street Journal* (September 22, 1982) entitled "Are Unions Becoming Irrelevant?" There was something very particular—and prescient—about how Drucker put that question. It suggested some fundamental disjuncture: the industrial order had gone off in one direction, the labor movement in another, and, in so doing, was in danger of becoming "irrelevant." Drucker's question has had a remarkable resonance: it defines the dominant strain of current thinking about the problems of American labor. And, from that perspective, there seems to have developed a broad consensus about the locus of that fatal disjuncture. It is at the workplace.

In *The Transformation of American Industrial Relations*, Thomas Kochan and his fellow authors write:

> Over the course of the past half century union and nonunion systems traded positions as the innovative force in industrial relations. . . . An alternative human resources management system . . . gradually overtook collective bargaining and emerged as the pacesetter by emphasizing high employee involvement and commitment and flexibility in the utilization of individual employees.[3]

Involvement, commitment, flexibility—these are the watchwords of the new industrial relations, and they are required, Ben Fischer tells us, "by very new forces in the patterns of ownership, management and market behavior, along with radical new technology. . . . The type of work being performed by workers is changing. The manner in which performance is sought contrasts drastically with yesterday's strategies."[4] The conclusion drawn by a distinguished panel of business and labor leaders for the Economic Policy Council (1990) is that

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> a "them and us" system of workplace relations [is] simply inadequate in today's social and economic environment. Finding the common interests of employees and employers, of unions and managers, and developing a process for overcoming the division between workers and managers, is the critical challenge that labor and capital must address in the decade ahead.[5]

The foregoing quotations, which could be duplicated many times over, fairly convey a broad consensus of what might be called "progressive" thinking (including inside the labor movement) about the obsolescence of the contractual system of workplace relations that took shape under industrial unionism.

The attack on that system has powerful programmatic implications. The way Peter Drucker initially defined the question—are unions becoming irrelevant?—embodied the most important part of the answer: namely, it identified the unions as the problem. And if the gap between institution and environment was wide enough, then it would follow—as indeed Drucker says—that "the labor union will have to transform itself drastically." Those who have focused on the workplace (as Drucker himself did not) draw the same conclusion. To adapt to the new industrial relations, says Ben Fischer, "will dictate a redefinition of what is a union." So labor's crisis has brought the movement to a juncture where this question is seriously contemplated: should institutional change be undertaken of the scope needed to promote a shift from adversarial to cooperative workplace relations?

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the mass-production regime to which that adversarial system was responsive is in fact coming to an end. Why should we believe that the succeeding regime will not in its turn set in motion a process that, like the one we have just surveyed, will end with a new adversarial system, a postmodern version, so to speak, of what Sumner Slichter half a century ago called industrial jurisprudence? The answer, at its most basic, would have to be that past experience no longer applies. Indeed, that is precisely what Ben Fischer does say about "the new face of much of industrial relations": it "is not a replay of history."

If that is true, then of course not much can be learned from labor's past. But we need to specify quite precisely the historical discontinuity that must occur: namely, that the new industrial relations not give rise to a crisis over industrial justice.

Proponents do indeed make that assumption. New modes of flexible production and knowledge-based operation, they argue, require an abandonment of the Taylorist reliance on hierarchical control and a rationalized division of labor. The emerging post-Taylorist system of industrial relations is characterized by what Charles Heckscher calls "managerialism," whose aim it is "that every employee be a manager, involved in decisions and contributing intelligently to the goals of the corporation." To achieve these results, corporations have enlisted a sophisticated human-resources science that Kochan, Katz and McKersie assure us has mastered the mysteries of employee motivation. Under its guidance, a wide range of programs have taken shape—all-salaried compensation, profit-sharing, work-sharing, flexible work schedules, payment for knowledge, autonomous work teams, ingenious systems of communication and grievance handling. "At its best," concludes Heckscher, "the managerialist order offers genuine improvements in the situation of employees as well as in the effectiveness of the orgnization."[6]

If the managerialist order at its "best" becomes the norm, what are the prospects for the labor movement? The critical question really is not how successful the existing unions can be at transforming their relations with organized employers. Without penetretating the new dynamic sectors, as it did in mass production fifty years ago, the labor movement can look forward only to stagnation and decline. In these sectors, no amount of union enthusiasm for cooperative relations and employee involvement is likely to persuade employers that collective bargaining is preferable to a union-free environment. And if Heckscher's managerialist order lives up to its promise, what incentive would their employees have for joining a union?

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But there are contrary facts to consider. Surveys show a startling rise in the levels of dissatisfaction in all categories of white-collar employees in recent years. Consider what the Opinion Research Corporation (ORC) found in surveys among managers at about two hundred companies over a thirty-year period from the 1950s to the early 1980s: those who rated their companies favorably in terms of fair application of policies and rules dropped from almost 80 percent to less than 40 percent, those who felt secure in their jobs declined from nearly 100 percent to 65 percent, those who thought their company was a better place to work than when they had started stood at a little higher than 25 percent. Among clerical workers, ORC figures indicated an approval rating of company fairness down from 70 percent in the 1950s to 20 percent in 1979. This is happening partly because of a new spirit of entitlement to state-mandated due process and anti-discriminatory rights, and even more because of the injury that cost-cutting programs and corporate restructuring in its various guises has inflicted on the privileged status of white collar and semi-professional employees. The current recession, moreover, suggests that their troubles may not be short-term. In a striking reversal of historic trends, it is the service sector that is lagging in an economic recovery. Heckscher sees signs of an emergent movement, still inchoate and divided among many interest groups, but acting "on a single premise: that corporations, while they may have property rights, have no right to abuse their employees."

"This is quite different from the premise that fueled industrial unionism," Heckscher adds. His error here is absolutely fundamental, masking as it does a vital continuity between past and present. Recall the moment at which industrial unionism crystallized during the 1930s. There had been a prior period of struggle driven, as now, by a deepening sense of industrial injustice among factory workers. That its roots may have been somewhat different from those animating the incipient movement that Heckscher describes seems to me not especially germane, so long as we are not prepared to deny that injustice can be as potent a conception for industrial workers as for middle managers and semiprofessionals, and as potent if it arises from the factory regime as from a sense of legal entitlement (although, with the adoption of Section 7a, there developed in the minds of industrial workers as well a strong sense of legal entitlement). During the battles over employee representation of the NRA period, the terms of a just workplace system took shape and gained the broad assent of all parties (including, in large measure, management). Empowered by the Wagner Act, the industrial unions then seized that system, gave it contractual form, and, in short, made themselves the institutional embodiment of the job interests of the mass-production workers.

In this achievement resides the essential historical continuity on which I am insisting: that what made trade unionism compelling to American workers in the past—and is likely to do so in the future—was its job-conscious capacity to link itself to their aspirations for industrial justice. The labor movement cannot itself define those aspirations, nor very much influence the processes that give rise to them. This was true for the industrial workers of the 1930s and true likewise of the incipient movement for employee rights to which Heckscher calls our attention. Should that movement reach crisis proportions, however, the stage would be set, so to speak, for the next CIO.[7]

American industrial relations have arrived at an odd juncture. How can we be moving at once toward a cooperative labor-management system and also toward a deepening crisis over employee rights? The explanation would seem to be that basic structural forces are in contradiction: postindustrial technology demands involvement and commitment from employees, but the competitive market and corporate restructuring now deny to all but the most sheltered firms the means for assuring the job security and predictable treatment on which employee commitment depends. How that contradiction is resolved remains to be seen, but on its resolution probably rides the future of the American labor movement. Insofar as the outcome favors managerialism, to that extent labor's prospects are surely foreclosed. It was

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because the contrary happened in the 1930s—because welfare capitalism failed under the stress of the Great Depression—that the occasion was provided for the rise of the industrial unions.

Embattled as it is, the labor movement hears on all sides today calls for an end to "adversarialism." Insofar as this means responsiveness to the logic of a post-Taylorist system of production, the advice is sound, and altogether consistent with historical experience. It bears repeating that, after all, the "adversarial" work-rules system now so roundly condemned was adopted not in opposition to, but directly in conformity with the logic of the mass-production regime. But retreating from "them and us" as a basic orientation is a different matter.

The labor movement will not prevail by trying to persuade nonunion employers. It is their employees who have to be persuaded, and, if and when that time comes, what will persuade them will be the only kind of appeal that has worked with American workers since the days of Samuel Gompers: namely, the identification of the union with their demand for industrial justice. The source of that appeal is the abiding job-consciousness of American trade unionism. In this sense, labor's past is deeply and irrevocably implicated in whatever future it has. □

Notes

[1] Quoted in Christopher Huxley, David Kettler, and James Struthers, "Is Canada's Experience 'Especially Instructive'?" in Seymour M. Lipset, *Unions in Transition: Entering the Second Century* (San Francisco, 1986), p.114.

[2] Readers who are curious about my own views on the history of American labor politics are invited to see my essay in Jack Greene, ed., *The Encyclopedia of American Political History* (New York, 1980).

[3] Thomas Kochan, Harry Katz, and Robert McKersie, *The Transformation of American Industrial Relations* (New York, 1986), 226-27.

[4] Ben Fischer, Speech, August 14, 1989, reprinted in *Daily Labor Report* (September 19, 1989), D-1.

[5] "The Common Interests of Employees and Employers in the 1990s," *Report of the Economic Policy Council Panel of the United Nations Association* (New York, 1990) [introductory pamphlet].

[6] Charles Heckscher, *The New Unionism: Employee Involvement in the Changing Corporation* (New York, 1987), p. 85.

[7] In this discussion I am focusing on what Dorothy Sue Cobble has recently characterized as "worksite unionism," in which job rights are defined in relationship to a particular site and employer. But, as she rightly notes, an increasing portion of the service sector is made up of workers ranging from highly skilled contract computer programmers to part-time, mostly female clericals who lack that relationship. For relatively mobile workers such as these, industrial justice would have a quite different content, arising in varying degrees from their concerns with occupational identity, control over the labor supply, portable rights and benefits, and peer determination of performance standards and workplace discipline. For such workers, the challenge to the labor movement is to come forth with a new institutional form that Cobble calls "occupational unionism." But its roots are, as she argues, already well established in the history of craft unionism and, indeed, Cobble's insights derive from her historical study of organized waitresses. (Dorothy Sue Cobble, "Organizing the Postindustrial Workforce: Lessons from the History of Waitress Unionism," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 44 (April 1991), pp. 419–36.) Both Cobble and Heckscher offer imaginative prescriptions for the labor law and institutional changes needed before the white-collar private sector can be organized. Whether the existing unions are incapable of transformation, as Heckscher is inclined to believe, seems to me something of an open question: after all, old-line AFL unions like the Teamsters, Machinists, and Meat Cutters proved extraordinarily resilient once challenged by the CIO, and current unions are much more flexible jurisdictionally than those of the 1930s. But it does not actually matter very much whether established unions do it, or whether new institutions emerge, or, as happened in the public sector, professional associations evolve into unions, so long as the end result is trade unionist in function.

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Robert B. Reich

TRAINING A SKILLED WORK FORCE

Why U.S. Corporations Neglect Their Workers

Over the last fifteen years American corporations have remained as competitive as ever. Their share of global exports has not significantly changed from what it was during the Carter years. The same cannot, however, be said of the competitiveness of the American work force. Today one out of five American eighteen-year-olds is functionally illiterate, and the real wages of nonsupervisory workers (about two-thirds of all wage earners) have plummeted 12 percent, putting them back where they were in the late 1950s after we adjust for inflation.

If we believed the news releases coming out of corporate public relations offices, we would assume that American business was aware of this troubling trend and on a crusade to improve the American work force. American firms claim to spend $30 billion a year improving the skills of their employees, and every time a CEO makes a speech about public education we hear how corporations are worried about America's students.

The truth is, however, that American business has spent very little on educating its workers. According to a recent Hudson Institute-Towers Perrin survey, only 8 percent of American firms provide their employees with training to improve their writing and verbal skills. The needs of low-level employees are the most neglected of all. According to the American Society for Training and Development, employees with college degrees are 50 percent more likely to receive corporate training than non–college graduates, and executives with postgraduate degrees are twice as likely to get training as those with college degrees. In short, training is typically provided to employees who need it least.

The same pattern of neglect holds for corporate America's highly touted generosity to schools. A few corporations are taking active roles, but the vast majority remain on the sidelines. The rate of corporate giving to American education has been declining for the past five years, and most of the money that is given never finds its way to public primary and secondary schools. Most corporate giving to American education flows to the nation's elite colleges.

To make matters worse, American corporations are busily siphoning off state and local tax dollars that might otherwise prop up the public schools. They do this by demanding tax breaks and subsidies as a condition for remaining in or coming to an area.

This strategy is typified by the Hyster Corporation, a manufacturer of fork-lift trucks, which in the early 1980s notified public officials in the five states and four nations where Hyster had factories that some of them would be closed. The governments were invited to bid to keep local jobs. Several American towns—including Kewanee, Illinois; Sulligent, Alabama; and Berea, Kentucky—surrendered a total of $18 million to attract or preserve around two thousand Hyster jobs. The biggest winner was Danville, Illinois, a city of 39,000 people, which agreed to provide Hyster with roughly $10 million in subsidies and tax breaks.

As a result of such bidding, corporations now pay a far smaller proportion of local taxes than they once did. The corporate share of local

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property tax revenues has dropped precipitously in recent decades, from 45 percent in 1957 to just 16 percent last year. Individual taxpayers have had to fill the gap, and in many poor and working-class towns, they just haven't had the money to pay for good schools.

Why isn't American business more worried about the state of the American work force? One answer is that American corporations are increasingly finding the skilled workers they need outside the United States and hiring them at a fraction of what they would pay in America.

The multinational American firm is nothing new, of course. But what is new is that a growing percentage of its employees are foreign. Typical of this trend is Seagate Technology, the California-based leader in computer hard-disk drives. Of Seagate's 40,000 employees, some 27,000 work in Southeast Asia—designing, fabricating, and assembling the drives that Seagate sells around the world. Or look at Whirlpool. After cutting its American work force by 10 percent, shifting much of its production to Mexico, and buying Dutch-owned Philips's appliance business, Whirlpool employed 43,500 people in 45 countries—most of them non-Americans. Even IBM—the very symbol of American technological preeminence—is beginning to tip the scales. Already 40 percent of its employees are foreign.

American firms are building factories abroad at a faster pace than in the United States. According to Rosanne Cahn of First Boston Corporation, in 1991 American firms planned to boost capital investment abroad by 14 percent compared with just 6.7 percent at home. American corporations already employ 11 percent of the industrial work force of Northern Ireland, mass producing everything from cigarettes to computer software, and in Singapore, United States firms employ over one hundred thousand Singaporeans, who fabricate and assemble electronic components for export back to the United States.

Advances in the technologies of communications and transportation enable firms to go to the remotest parts of the planet. Until the late 1970s, AT&T had depended on workers in Shreveport, Louisiana, to assemble standard telephones for the American market. AT&T then discovered that workers in Singapore would perform the same tasks, as reliably, at a far lower cost. AT&T could set up a state-of-the-art manufacturing plant in Singapore; coordinate its production with other AT&T facilities around the world via computer, satellite, fax, and modem; and transport its output efficiently via cargo plane and container to wherever telephones were needed. By the late 1980s, AT&T found that workers in Thailand were happy to assemble telephones for a small fraction of the wages of workers in Singapore, and could do so as efficiently and reliably. So AT&T disassembled its Singapore plant and built a new one in Thailand.

Services are also being farmed out around the world. Most of the employees of Saztec International, a twenty-million-dollar-a-year data-processing firm headquartered in Kansas City, live and work in the Philippines. Mountains of raw data are shipped or telephoned to them—records of credit card purchases and payments, credit reports, cleared checks, customer accounts, payroll, billings,

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personnel records, and so on—which they then enter into computers.

American Airlines employs over a thousand data processors in Barbados and the Dominican Republic to enter names and flight numbers from used airline tickets (flown daily to Barbados from airports around the United States) into a giant computer bank located in Dallas. Chicago publisher R.R. Donnelly sends entire manuscripts to Barbados for computer entry in preparation for printing. New York Life dispatches insurance claims to Castle-island, Ireland, where workers determine the amounts due and then instantly transmit the computations back to the United States. McGraw-Hill processes subscription renewal and marketing information in nearby Galway.

If they need more skilled workers, American firms are finding them abroad, too. Texas Instruments maintains a software development facility in Bangalore, India. There, fifty Indian programmers are linked by satellite with Texas Instruments' Dallas headquarters. Spurred by this and similar ventures, India is building a teleport in Poona, to make it cheaper for other firms to send their software design specs to India's growing corps of software engineers. Engineers in Singapore are helping Hewlett-Packard develop a new generation of laser printers and helping Apple Computer design video screens of the future.

Even advanced research and development is going to foreigners. According to the National Science Foundation, American firms increased their overseas spending on research and development (R&D) by 33 percent between 1986 and 1988 (the last date for which such data are available), compared to a 6 percent increase in R&D in the United States.

The list of U.S. firms that have recently opened research facilities in Japan reads like a *Who's Who* of corporate America: Eastman Kodak, W.R. Grace, DuPont, Merck, Procter & Gamble, Upjohn, IBM, to name a few. At DuPont's Yokohama lab, more than 180 Japanese scientists and technicians work on developing new materials. IBM's Tokyo research lab, tucked away behind the far side of the Imperial Palace in downtown Tokyo, houses a small army of Japanese engineers who are perfecting image-processing technology. In IBM's Kanagawa lab in Yamato City, fifteen hundred Japanese researchers are developing advanced hardware and software.

American firms are also relying on European techniques and researchers. In the late 1980s, two researchers at IBM's Zurich lab came up with breakthroughs into superconductivity and microscopy, which earned each of them Nobel prizes. One of Procter & Gamble's most successful products of the 1980s—Liquid Tide—was the handiwork of the company's European researchers.

But what about all the work that can't be sent abroad? What about retail service workers, secretaries, clerks, hospital workers? Why aren't American firms worried about providing them with better training?

Here, too, American business has found a way to avoid paying for the education of its work force—immigration. As the *Wall Street Journal* recently put it, "As long as we don't train enough Americans ourselves, immigration is a saving grace." The Bush administration came to a similar conclusion in the 1990 *Economic Report of the President:* "With projections of a rising demand for skilled workers in coming years, the nation can achieve even greater benefits from immigration." To get the skilled workers we need, the administration recommended "increasing quota limits for potential immigrants with higher levels of basic and specific skills."

What the administration was recommending was in fact a policy that was already being practiced. During the 1980s, some eight million immigrants—almost as many as in the first decade of the century—entered the United States legally. Faced with a shortage of skilled nurses in the 1980s, American hospitals began recruiting nurses from the Philippines and Ireland to come to the United States on temporary work visas. By 1989, Congress decided that the nursing shortage was sufficiently serious that these temporary nurses—more than ten thousand of them—should be

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granted permanent American citizenship. A recent amendment to the immigration laws, strongly supported by American business, creates a new category of skilled immigrant to whom an extra 54,000 visas will be issued each year.

In sum, as we enter the 1990s, American firms face no shortage of literate, reliable, minimally skilled workers. When American workers don't measure up, American business simply turns elsewhere, finding the workers it needs in another country or bringing them to America.

For American workers, the consequences of this trend are a disaster. More than half of the 32.5 million Americans whose incomes fall under the official poverty line live in households with at least one full-time worker. Today poverty is as much a result of not having the skills for a decent paying job as being unemployed.

Ironically, foreign-owned firms may be coming to the rescue. Although they are not doing much to improve the quality of American education (and are demanding many of the same subsidies and tax breaks from local governments as do American corporations), foreign firms operating in the United States seem to be doing a better job at training their lower-level American workers and helping them achieve higher levels of productivity.

Japanese firms, which now employ almost two million Americans, have been spending about $1,000 more each year training their lower-level American workers than what's spent by American firms. And their American workers are often producing better products. Although the 1990 *Consumer Reports* ranks most Japanese cars higher in quality than American cars, it finds no difference between the quality of Japanese cars produced in the United States by American workers and those made in Japan.

Americans who work in Japanese automotive factories in the United States are almost as productive as their Japanese co-workers back in Japan, and far more productive than American workers in U.S. auto plants. According to a recent survey, an American worker in a Japanese plant can assemble a car in 19.5 hours, as compared to the 19.1 hours it takes an average Japanese autoworker in Japan and 26.5 hours it takes an average American autoworker in an American auto factory. After Toyota assumed control over General Motors' Fremont, California, plant in 1984, productivity rose by over 50 percent and absenteeism plummeted from 25 percent to 4 percent.

There is, however, no way that foreign-owned firms can solve the problems the American work force now faces. America must make a vast investment—at least $2 trillion in the 1990s—to prepare our work force for the next century. Global capital will create high-wage jobs in the United States only if we can offer skilled workers and a first-class infrastructure.

Right now we are moving in exactly the wrong direction for such a transformation to take place. We underfinance Head Start, child nutrition, and other preschool programs. Our per-pupil spending on kindergarten through high school lags behind that of five other industrialized nations. Federal outlays for worker training have been slashed by 50 percent since 1980, and federal grants and loans for college students have been cut 13 percent over the decade.

Meanwhile, our spending on infrastructure has fallen by almost a third, resulting in collapsing bridges, crumbling highways, dilapidated subways, overflowing sewers, and rush-hour traffic jams extending for miles. Hard-pressed states and localities can't begin to make up the difference in lost federal dollars.

Where will we get the money to retrain our work force and rebuild our infrastructure? In part, from American business itself. Although a skilled and educated work force is still in the interest of corporate America as a whole (when skilled workers can't be found more cheaply abroad), no individual company will reap much benefit from investing in the training of its low-level employees—apart from public-relations advantages. Employees who have gained broadly applicable skills can always leave and go to work for another company. Training is, in this sense, a "public good." One answer to this classic market imperfection is to require by law that each company devote a percentage of its

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total payroll (say, 2.5 percent, as in France) to the training of its nonsupervisory workers or, if it spends less than this minimum, contribute the difference to a training fund available to any employee on a voluntary basis.

Ultimately, investments in human capital and infrastructure must be public responsibilities. All other factors of production—plant, equipment, money, technology—are becoming footloose, moving effortlessly across borders. The skills and insights of a nation's people, and the transportation and communications infrastructures linking them together and to the global economy, are the sole remaining unique attributes of a national economy.

The United States has the ability to make the investments that a modern national economy requires. A 15-percent-a-year cut in current and planned military expenditures would yield $450 billion over the decade. A federal income tax as progressive as it was in 1978 would require the top 10 percent of income earners to pay $950 billion more than they are supposed to now. And by removing the $54,000 cap on income subject to the pension and disability portions of the Social Security payroll tax and treating all Social Security benefits as taxable income (while exempting the poorest fifth of workers and retirees from both taxes), an additional $600 billion could be generated over the decade.

The real question is, finally, not whether we have the resources to prepare the American work force for the next century but whether we have the political will. Reaganomics was sold to the country on the premise that the fruits of American investment would "trickle down" to enrich the average worker. Now that they have not, the question is whether the Democrats are prepared to argue for a policy that challenges the Republican orthodoxy of the 1980s.

At no time since the Great Depression has there been a better occasion for the party of Roosevelt and Kennedy and Johnson to champion the working class. □

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David Kusnet

THE NEW, YOUNG ORGANIZERS

What Makes Them Run?

Earl is a small, quiet town in the old sharecropping country of eastern Arkansas. But on October 25, 1991, a noisy drama was taking place in the parking lot of Earl Industries, the town's leading employer. Staging a grim parody of a strike in an effort to scare workers out of voting for a union in the federally supervised election being conducted that day, supervisors from the factory were marching around, wearing company tee-shirts, carrying picket signs, and shouting slogans. Nearby, the company had set up an exhibit of photographs of scenes from actual labor disputes. Meanwhile, to show that they weren't intimidated, a group of workers from the factory were wearing union tee-shirts, holding hands, and singing gospel music.

The confrontation was one more episode in more than a decade of labor-management conflict at the factory, where more than three hundred workers make garment bags, shoe bags, and fabric hangers for closets. On October 25, workers were voting for the second time in 1991 on whether to be represented by the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU). The union had won an earlier election in March by a margin of 172 to 101, but the company had filed objections with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), claiming that the presence of an AFL-CIO video crew during the campaign had intimidated workers. And, after the union won the second election by 165 to 131, the company once again challenged the result, objecting to events surrounding an appearance by Rev. Jesse Jackson in support of ACTWU.

Delaying tactics are nothing new to the company's management. More than a decade earlier, after employees voted to be represented by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), the company kept stalling in contract negotiations and eventually persuaded workers to vote out the union. However, a core group of workers kept the union idea alive and provided the base for ACTWU's organizing efforts. The organizers found a "hot shop," where workers were eager to hear the union's message. Mostly black women, the workers get low pay, meager benefits, and minimal respect. "It's just like working in the cotton fields, except you're out of the sun," workers told the organizers.

But it takes patience to build a union, win an election, and bargain a contract. For employees who'd stuck it out for more than a decade, still talking union after years of management resistance, their endurance is near-heroic. For the union organizer who spends a year or more in a campaign like Earl Industries, where you can win two elections and find yourself back at square one, persistence is part of the job description.

What's almost as remarkable as the heroism of the workers at Earl Industries is that, after the cynicism of the seventies and the selfishness of the eighties, there are still young people eager to devote their lives to union organizing—a job that will pay them much less, and challenge them much more, than almost any other career they could choose.

Two of the organizers working on the Earl campaign are typical of the people in their thirties and forties who are the shock troops of today's labor movement. Thirty-one-year-old

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Duane Stillwell is organizing director for ACTWU's southwestern region, which includes Arkansas. A "white suburban kid" who grew up near Denver, the son of a salesman and a secretary, he's living proof that the modern middle-class experience can still produce union firebrands.

As a high school student working in a local McDonald's, Stillwell tried to organize his co-workers. One night when he was working at the fast-food restaurant, a police officer walked up to the counter and warned him to "keep your head down and make sure you have witnesses wherever you go," because the word was out that the store's manager was going to have some of his friends go after Stillwell. Stillwell was never beaten up, but he was fired. "It was an incredibly radicalizing experience," recalls Stillwell, who says his own political commitments are concentrated on the practicalities of winning better wages and conditions for working people.

As a college student, Stillwell unsuccessfully tried to organize workers at the Pizza Hut where he waited on tables, and found himself challenging company lawyers at an NLRB hearing. "On one side were the company lawyers in suits," he remembers. "And on the other side were a bunch of us in plaid shirts and blue jeans. We wrote our own briefs, presented our own case, and, of course, they beat us." That was when Stillwell decided to go to law school, so that "never again would I be in a great organizing position and get beat in a courtroom."

At law school, Stillwell remained an activist, organizing his co-workers at a Legal Aid clinic and winning more resources for the student attorneys. After passing the bar examination, he took a job with a law firm for six months, then "took a big pay cut and leave of absence from which I've never returned" to become a union organizer.

Based in St. Louis, Stillwell travels throughout Missouri, southern Illinois, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Texas, Kansas, and Oklahoma, usually working "hundred-hour weeks." Yes, "it's incredibly difficult on my personal life," Stillwell admits, but he sees himself making a career of it.

Another organizer who wants to make a career of it is Megan Parke, who, at age twenty-three, was on-the-scene coordinator for the campaign at Earl Industries. Parke grew up in Champaign-Urbana, a college town in Central Illinois, and attended Sarah Lawrence College, where she concentrated on labor studies and women's studies. Her studies convinced Parke that "the women's movement and the labor movement directly intersect." And her personal observation showed her that service workers at the college were underpaid and exploited. So, in her senior year, when she had the option of pursuing independent studies and work experience, she took a job with the Coalition of Labor Union Women designing its reproductive rights program, and wrote her senior thesis on how the women's movement influenced the growth of flight attendants' unions.

Learning that the AFL-CIO had started a new program to train union organizers, Parke enrolled in the course in 1990, participated in several campaigns in Virginia, and was hired as an organizer by ACTWU's southwestern region. She moved to Austin, Texas, and, during the past year, she's spent most of her time in Earl and other small towns in Arkansas. In one community, where the union faced an even more uphill fight than in Earl, the company's management "turned a lot of the town against us," and a local restaurant even refused to serve her lunch.

Challenges like that don't discourage Parke, nor does a typical workday which she describes as "Get up at 5:45 in the morning to leaflet the plant, eat breakfast, go back to the motel room to write a leaflet and do paperwork, meet workers for lunch, then get the leaflet copied, meet with the staff, visit workers at home until late at night, then get ready for tomorrow morning's leafleting." The job doesn't offer "immediate gratification," but there are rewards, like "the roar we heard from the workers in the parking lot" when word went out that the union had won the second election at Earl Industries.

The training program in which Parke participated is the AFL-CIO Organizing Institute, founded by the labor federation in 1989. It was

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an innovation whose novelty was appreciated by close observers of the labor movement. Since the 1930s and 1940s, when organizers fanned out into America's auto plants, steel mills, electronics factories, garment shops, textile mills, loading docks, and retail stores, organizing had been something of a stepchild within all but the largest and most activist unions. While unions representing teachers, government employees, and health-care workers conducted successful organizing drives during the past two decades, most other unions had a hard time protecting their existing members in an era when basic industries declined and corporate managements cut payrolls, wage scales, and fringe benefits. Particularly for smaller unions in private industry, the cost of recruiting, training, and deploying organizers became increasingly prohibitive.

Thus, the AFL-CIO Organizing Institute serves urgent needs: recruiting a new generation of organizers, making them available to unions throughout the labor movement, and evaluating organizing campaigns and devising new strategies. The institute is sponsored by six unions with aggressive organizing efforts—ACTWU, the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the United Food and Commercial Workers, the Service Employees, the United Steelworkers, and the Carpenters—which use trainees in their campaigns and hire graduates of the program. And other unions are also using the institute's services, from organizing advice to staff training.

The institute's director, Richard Bensiger, is an ACTWU veteran who seeks out potential organizers with the same zeal with which he used to recruit union members. Several hundred potential organizers have already passed through the institute's training program since it first opened its doors in 1990, and most have been placed in full-time organizing jobs with unions at the national and regional levels.

The institute looks for a mixed bag of organizers, and that's what it's getting. Bensiger estimates that most of the program's graduates are rank-and-file members ranging from people in their twenties to those in their forties, who know unions and the workday world from the inside and welcome the chance to try their hand at organizing. Other recruits come out of community organizing or political campaigns. Still others, like Megan Parke, are recent college graduates.

To coordinate recruiting on the campuses, the institute recently hired twenty-two-year-old Anike Ajagunna, who was student-body president at Rutgers University's New Brunswick campus and serves on the board of the U.S. Student Association. Working through student organizations and college career placement services, the institute recruits from a cross-section of campuses, including state universities, the Ivy Leagues, and historically black colleges.

For all the talk that the spirit of the times has produced a materialistic majority of young people and a "politically correct" minority who are pure in spirit but preoccupied with questions of personal identity, the institute does succeed in finding potential organizers on campus with the talent, the attitude, and the energy to be useful to the unions. Many of the best recruits, Bensinger says, are students from working-class backgrounds who attend elite colleges and find "it grates on them being around kids from more privileged backgrounds.

"There's a real anger among many of these young people, directed against the overselling of false gods of the eighties—the Boeskys and Lorenzos and Trumps," Bensinger observes. "We get these applications—twenty of them a day on the average—and one after another talks about greed and escaping the yuppie syndrome and living a life where you make a real contribution to society. They're more grounded than a lot of people were in the sixties, and that's good."

The best organizers, Bensinger says, are persistent and pragmatic, people who get angry at injustice but aren't in the grip of an abstract ideology. Ajagunna notes that, for the children of the eighties—"products of the world of microwaves and MTV"—patience may be the most important virtue of all. "We're getting a minority of students who feel alienated from the eighties," she says.

Talking to these evangelists for the union organizer's life, I thought back to my own

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years as a traveling troubleshooter for AFSCME. For eight years, from 1976 through 1984, I traveled around the country, writing organizing literature for union drives and doing public relations for strikes, struggles against budget cutbacks, and other crisis situations. Those years left me with some of my best memories and many of my best friends. The organizer's life took me from age twenty-five to thirty-three, and only in the last year did I tire of it.

At age twenty-three, Megan Parke says emphatically, "I don't want to sit behind a desk." At age thirty-three, I found myself thinking I didn't want to spend the rest of my life living out of motel rooms. Although I left union work because I wanted to pursue other interests, there are those who leave solely because they tire of life on the road. Many stay on union staffs but lose the energy and enthusiasm of their younger selves. For those who manage union staffs, the challenge is not only to recruit more young dynamos like Parke and Ajagunna but to find ways to hold on to dedicated staffers and keep them doing their best work.

The Organizing Institute's Richard Bensinger is fully aware of the danger that some seasoned staffers will resign, retire, or burn out before passing their skills and experiences along to the next generation. "That's a tragedy of the labor movement," he explains, "potential mentors who never get the chance to mentor."

By emphasizing the importance not only of organizing new members but of training new organizers, the Organizing Institute may bring in new blood and recharge old batteries. For union veterans weary of the road-warrior's life but wary of becoming desk-bound bureaucrats, there should be the possibility of making a mid-life arrangement: training and guiding a new generation of organizers. As the late jazz great Art Blakey used to say: "I like working with those youngsters. It keeps the mind active." □

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George Packer

CLASS INTEREST, LIBERAL STYLE

A Social Conflict in Massachusetts

A year ago almost everyone I knew in Boston was agonizing over how to be liberal when it seemed no longer really an option. Two men were running for governor of the only state that voted for George McGovern. One was a wealthy Republican who had supported a candidate to the right of Ronald Reagan in the 1980 presidential primaries; the other was an angry Democrat who had managed to offend Cambodians, blacks, working mothers, environmentalists, abortion rights activists, and the elderly. People said it was a choice between a Republican and a "fascist," and they would sound each other out over the phone, warily, not wanting to give too much away in case their own feelings happened to be the wrong ones. In private they tossed between William Weld and John Silber like a flu sufferer unable to find a comfortable position in bed.

Perhaps one day in our political future liberalism will cease to be an option, and perhaps in some places it already has, but a year ago in Massachusetts there was still a liberal safety valve. You could vote against Question 3, a business-inspired ballot initiative to roll taxes back by $2 billion or more. You could stand in the cold with union electricians holding up "No on 3" signs at evening rush hour along freeway entrances in South Boston and show thumbs-up to the truck drivers who saluted you with honks and laugh together at silver-haired men in Oldsmobile Cutlasses who flipped you off on their way home to the exurbs. You could go back elated to your own liberal enclave, where everybody had a "No on 3" sticker, imagining that the New Deal was still alive, or the New Populism, or the Emerging Progressive Majority. At least until the phone rang for your next Weld-Silber conversation.

The coincidence of these campaigns, the mood swings they produced in middle-class liberals, revealed one of the terrible secrets that lie in the belly of the left's catastrophic failure. This one is so secret, and so painful, that even when hard choices forced it out in the last months of 1990, no one wanted to admit that we had just belched up the problem of class.

Five days before the election I went to a meeting at the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) union hall where Boston ward coordinators for "No on 3" were hearing last-hour strategy from the campaign's leaders. The meeting room was like a vision of coalition politics. There were rank-and-file members in union windbreakers from the Laborers, the Sheet Metal Workers, the Ironworkers, and there were teachers and public employees in ties; there was a woman from Chinatown and several blacks from Roxbury and Mattapan; community organizers, union officers, young progressive-taxation types. The polls showed that we'd come from way behind to several points ahead. Now the ward leaders were talking about an election day blitz, phone calls, visibilities, and we were all catching each other's confidence. Some were here out of principle, others out of self-interest, but these motives were no longer to be easily distinguished. Even the young Irish guys from the Dorchester Laborers local who knew that cutting taxes meant lost construction jobs also believed that 3 was *wrong*. People were talking about schools, hospitals, fire departments, parks, libraries. No one had to stand up and sing "Solidarity Forever" for us to feel it.

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After the meeting, I fell into conversation with a heavy, chain-smoking older man (ten years younger than he looked) from the East Boston "Italian" Laborers local. When I asked him whether he'd made up his mind for governor, he reacted as if I were sounding him out on faith in God. Silber, of course—who else? Silber was against 3, Weld was for it; Silver wanted to clean up state government, Weld wanted to get rid of it; Silber was an angry Democrat, Weld was a rich Republican. He talked about how bad times were for the unions, and how selfish people had become, especially the yuppies without children who didn't care about the future. This man, born in the depression, still laboring at sixty, had that archaic thing, class consciousness. He truly hated "the rich"—he even used the phrase.

Surprised and impressed, I finally asked if he thought everyone else in the room was for Silber. He paused. "Maybe two or three ain't."

Maybe he wondered about me. I wore no union windbreaker. My accent placed me in the infertile educated classes. And in Cambridge, where I live, Silber, who seemed to offend people willfully, was regarded as a madman. His campaign was perfectly suited to an age that lives politically for sound bites, preferably gaffes. Everyone could quote the slurs that Silber barked like someone with Tourette's syndrome: the state had become "a welfare magnet" for Cambodians, working mothers sacrificed their kids to "third-rate day care," health money shouldn't be spent on the very old who were "ripe to go." He was arrogant, mean, authoritarian. Perhaps he was mad; he was certainly angry. And he seemed to catch the mood of a good many people who were nonetheless voting against 3.

I spent an hour holding signs with a mechanic from South Boston who cursed Dukakis and all politicians, cursed gay activists, cursed the deficit and the waste of tax money; perhaps only the presence of a sign-holder from Roxbury kept him from cursing blacks. Until very recently he'd been ready to vote for 3; but he was also out of work, and South Boston was crumbling, and he decided that there was no point in committing suicide. But, he told me, "if the politicians fuck us over this time . . ." He slammed a fist into his open hand.

I decided that if even this man was going to vote against 3, the other side didn't have a chance. For once, they were the elite and we had the people. That night I ordered the double cheeseburger special at a greasy spoon in Harvard Square. The waitress, who looked about as old as the East Boston laborer, noticed my "No on 3" button, and saw me notice her "Helen Furlong Metros for State Senator" button. Confidently (she was a waitress—she had to be one of us) I asked what she thought of Question 3.

"It's easy for you teachers to be against it," she said bitterly, "but what about the real working people?" Property taxes had skyrocketed, she had mortgage payments, she couldn't afford her auto insurance. As she stood there holding her forgotten order pad, she went on about a mother-in-law she couldn't afford to put in a nursing home, and cuts in meals for the elderly, in transportation for the elderly, cuts in aid to the towns—until I thought she was about to argue *against* more tax cuts. But she was just angry. She walked away, leaving me stunned silent, and then she came back in tears and apologized and hugged me and took my order. Later, when I asked who Helen Furlong Metros was, she pointed to herself. "That's me." It turned out to be her sixth attempt; she usually picked up about 14,000 votes.

A cabbie once explained to me why Boston drivers are so rude. "It has to do with class," he said. Boston has been rigidly divided for two centuries, with a prominent and powerful elite and a large, entrapped working class. So people in the city are chronically angry. "I'm Mad, But I'm Not Crazy," the unions' "No on 3" bumper sticker proclaimed. The campaign leadership's sticker, the one you saw in middle-class neighborhoods, said "No on 3—It Goes Too Far." This was too mealy-mouthed for the union guys, whose pick-up trucks sometimes showed the sticker with the second half ripped off.

But middle-class liberals weren't mad; they were bewildered by the public's mood. And in the last days, even as No on 3 was surging, I sensed that it was becoming O.K. to come out for Weld; people began announcing it with a

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kind of defensive defiance, as if they were justifying a healthy taste for pornographic videos. If you had decided for Silber, you kept it to yourself. A friend spent half an hour making the case for Silber as Hitler. Others were making a case for Weld as Elliot Richardson. A gay activist told the *Boston Globe,* "If we elect Bill Weld, we'll defeat the right wing in both parties with one brilliant stroke." The *Globe* itself endorsed him, and with that Weld's campaign manager announced that Dukakis liberals "now feel it is acceptable" to vote Republican.

"It only hurts for a minute," a well-known Democratic activist assured his fellow liberals, finding it possible to forget that when Weld made good on his undisguised plan to dismantle state government, uncushioned voters would experience pain much longer.

It came down to the fact that middle-class liberals hated Silber and only disagreed with Weld. I think they even sneakingly liked Weld—he lived in Cambridge, he'd gone to Harvard, he came from old Yankee money, he was witty and self-deprecating. Certainly he *seemed* more like them, culturally, than Silber did. And in the absence of any compelling economic self-interest or any overwhelming anger it became possible to vote their likes and dislikes. Anyway, there was still Question 3 on which to vote their principles.

It wasn't easy. I had to force my right hand down with my left to prick the Silber perforation on the ballot card.

A year ago I began to realize how little class matters to most liberal-minded people any more. Or perhaps how little they're aware of how much it matters to them. During the campaign middle-class liberals didn't see that however "temperamentally unfit" they found Silber, it was only their relative comfort that enabled them to vote on that judgment. If I pointed this out, it made them angrier than anything going on in government or the depressed economy.

The Weld-Silber race showed perfectly how far the politics of correct speech has taken over liberal thinking, and at what cost. It mattered more that Silber referred carelessly to "a bunch of drug addicts" in Roxbury than that he was willing to spend money on drug treatment and Weld wasn't. In general these days, enlightened people seem to anguish more over whether to say black or African American than over the fact that real wages have dropped in the past decade. It's not heartlessness; it's simply that you're more likely to have to choose which name to use than to think about declining wages—especially if your own have increased. And when you have almost no political power, it's easier to get rid of insulting speech than to raise wages. So throughout the years of its collapse the liberal left has become more and more a movement for cultural purification and less and less a movement for economic equality. Its watchword is "offensive." Bring up equality and people shrug, shake their heads—we don't know how to get there. Instead, we've made a revolution in our tables of contents.

Textbook publishers nowadays speak of the RCG factor—for Race, Class, and Gender. A friend who is putting together a literature textbook for freshmen has been told unequivocally that he has to include a certain quota of RCG—or, more recently, of CREG, for Class, Race, Ethnicity, and Gender (the acronyms themselves are a sign of atrophy, political lifelessness). This is no longer surprising. But it's also misleading: CREG should really be REG. The publishers don't want class—they only prod my friend for Race, Ethnicity, and Gender. "Class Struggle" is the *New York Times Magazine*'s punning title for an article on the debate over multicultural textbooks in California primary schools—but nowhere in its account of the tribalist war for the hearts and minds of eight-year-olds does class come up. No steelworkers have come forward to protest the way the texts portray them. The furor over multiculturalism, whatever its merits, is at least partly a symptom of liberals' powerlessness and despair.

I'll go a little farther: the ideal of economic equality has been quietly dropped not just because it seems hopeless but also because achieving it would mean a change of a great deal more than attitude. I can extinguish my last homophobic impulses, I can keep in mind the difference between fear of crime and

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racism, I can give to the homeless man outside the ATM while recognizing the social forces that have put him there, I can bring my own plastic bag to the supermarket. But how do I get rid of real, implacable inequality? What if greater equality meant that I had to accept a lower standard of living—would I want that? I am willing to march, sign, speak, vote, donate—but not eat in when I can go to Siam Garden. Class, which involves money but also education, background, taste, even taste buds, is about the hardest thing in the world to overcome. Like the instinct for physical comfort, it determines so much about one's life that it's hardly noticed. Even wanting to overcome it won't necessarily make it happen. I tried once, and the effort was a failure.

I spent my first four years in Boston working as a laborer and carpenter. Not only that—in where I lived, what I drove, what I wore, the beer I drank, I attempted to drop several socioeconomic classes from the one into which I was born. The reasons for doing so were complicated, but my point here is that even on $6 an hour it wasn't easy.

Even among carpenters there turned out to be a cultural split between the union-card-carrying construction workers who put their tool belts on at 7 A.M., took them off at 3:30, and used Milwaukee power tools in between, and the art-school dropouts who wandered in late, ate sprout sandwiches at lunch, and worshipped Japanese tools. It was inevitable that I would gravitate toward the Japanese-tool-users. I had to watch myself constantly, like a dieter with a sluggish metabolism. I vowed never to eat at a new Tex-Mex theme restaurant where you paid $8.95 for quesadillas; but one evening I found myself there. Over the years the whole unconscious pull of my life—whom I knew, their expectations and preferences, and finally, I had to acknowledge, my own—brought me back like a homing pigeon into the world of espresso coffee and Sam Adams lager. Of course my project had been doomed from the start, of course I was priggish and deluded. But I was up against some powerful forces.

It turns out that I was struggling down during a decade—the 1980s—when the top fifth in America was pulling away from the other four-fifths, isolating itself by neighborhood, school, income, spending patterns, as never before. In 1990, the economist Robert Reich has pointed out, "the top fifth of working Americans took home more money than the other four-fifths put together—the highest portion in postwar history." Reich calls this trend "the secession of the successful": the top layer of educated professionals, the "symbolic analysts" of the postindustrial world, no longer even live in the same economy as the rest of America. They are "linked by jet, modem, fax, satellite and fiber-optic cable" to an ever-expanding world economy. They never even have to leave their exurbs, their "edge cities"—everything they need is out there, privately paid for. A depression in the city can be a boom in the edge city.

In his affecting book *Which Side Are You On?,* Thomas Geoghegan, a Chicago labor lawyer, admits that in spite of his work with unions, his professional salary means "I have no idea how anyone else lives, how the bottom four-fifths of the country gets along. When I hear that the median family income in America is $29,000 a year (in 1986), I take out my passport and wonder what country I have wandered into. . . . I cannot even begin to guess what the real, unwritten life of my own country is like. And I am a labor lawyer, too. I represent them."

So to drop a notch or two nowadays is to take a very steep fall.

If class divisions have hardened with the years of low wages for most and easy money for a few, then even middle-class liberals have to ask themselves: Who am *I*? Am I a symbolic analyst with no idea of the real, unwritten life of my country? Are my principles (justice, fairness, community) hopelessly at odds with my instincts (good schools, safe neighborhoods, stable property values)? Is it possible today to be truly public-spirited on an income above $50,000?

I'm not leveling at liberals the easy charge of hypocrisy. I only want to suggest that public reality now makes it very difficult for enlightened people truly to want what they think they want. A kind of dissociation arises between values and impulses. This state of mind

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prevails much more than one realizes: it sometimes takes an accident to make it vivid, as it became one afternoon during the campaign when I went to the public hospital where my girlfriend was a mental health worker. Together with about fifty doctors, nurses, and patients, we marched outside against budget cuts and Question 3. The hospital staff took turns using a bullhorn to describe the effects of cuts in their own department. Then a young woman from a national health care reform group stepped up. Here was a perfect opportunity to tell this sympathetic crowd how their own problems were part of a larger crisis in health care and to win them over to the side of reform. Instead, she gave a canned speech full of slogans about how "the workers" suffered while profits were reaped by business and the insurance companies, fueling defense spending, militarism, and so on. All true—but within thirty seconds she'd lost her audience of health care professionals, who probably never thought of themselves as "workers" in the first place.

Later I talked with this activist, and when I speculated that if the left was ever going to succeed in health care reform or anything else it needed to win back the "Reagan Democrats," the white lower three-fifths, she snapped back: "I think they're ripe for fascism."

This was what she really thought of "the workers."

Out of insularity, out of fatigue, out of fear, it has become normal to liberals that the white lower three-fifths will hate them. In 1988, while Dukakis was losing to Bush, the unions in Massachusetts were fighting against Question 2, an initiative (by the people who later brought us Question 3) that would have repealed the state's prevailing wage law on construction contracts. No on 2 was labor's first attempt in the state to build a coalition with liberals, and it worked. Yet it became common to see construction trucks with "Question 2/Bad for You" and "Bush-Quayle" bumper stickers side by side.

No wonder class is a submerged topic. It's too much for any sensitive person's conscience.

Recently I spoke with a friend who is filming a TV documentary about the "working poor" in Milwaukee who used to have high-wage, blue-collar jobs and now can't keep afloat in the new "service" economy. We discussed Robert Reich and the top one-fifth, the hidden costs to the symbolic analysts of their own secession, the corporate warnings of skilled labor shortages and the possibility that there will never be enough jobs. And then, offhandedly, my friend mentioned that he is besieged these days with calls from people in his own line of work looking for job leads—people without employment desperate to be making films about Milwaukee's "working poor."

It's hard to know what's really happening out there. As Thomas Geoghegan says, "It is impossible to talk about the American economy now as if it were a single, seamless thing. If I try to talk about the 'economy' with anyone in my 'class,' it turns into a wild lunging conversation, and I talk about A, and he or she talks about B, and both of us end up utterly frustrated and angry. In the old days, it was pretty clear when the American economy was 'good' and when it was 'bad.' " Geoghegan is referring to the separate economies for lawyers and steelworkers; but he could be talking about lawyers and architects, or lawyers in Massachusetts and lawyers in Utah. It can be sunny in one part of the exurb and pouring rain in another—particularly as the cost of a safe, decent life grows with the advancing decay of cities, industrial areas, whole regions. I know a couple who live in West Hartford. They are dedicated liberals, and given a better choice they wouldn't live in an all-white suburb. But the alternative of living in Hartford where they work is out of the question: Hartford, the fourth poorest city in the country, is dirty and dangerous. In the middle of Connecticut's budget crisis the husband lost his job at a state agency. Suddenly, in spite of their postgraduate educations and personal computers, they found themselves strapped, with a child, living anxiously like imposters among the insurance people and bankers. Perhaps their mistake was to have tied themselves in any way to the government. In the future it won't be enough merely to have an advanced degree and a

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foothold in some island of clean streets; you will have to make sure none of your money comes from the public sector. Perhaps even that won't be security enough. These days I hear of thirty-five-year-olds in corporate jobs taking out nursing-home insurance.

On the one hand, hardening class division—everyone admits this except a few Republican policy experts. On the other hand, the jitters, even among the symbolic analysts—jitters that cause the division to stiffen even as it quakes. It's a situation ripe for something; maybe for some activists eventually to shout through bullhorns what they only let slip in private—that they fear and despise the people whose cause they might once have championed. Then, at least, they wouldn't have to falsify their feelings.

In my more hopeful moments I can imagine some good coming from this political darkness we've been living in. I can imagine—it never lasts very long—an end to the miserable split between the professor who sneers at the American flag decal on a pickup truck and the construction worker who flips off a state worker holding a Dukakis sign. It's easiest to imagine it happening if they begin to have common interests and to *perceive* that they do. We may yet see another surge of social commitment, idealism, solidarity. But I would rather it surged on the solid ground of self-interest than in the weightless atmosphere of self-righteousness. I have nothing against righteousness; I just doubt its staying power.

Question 3 was defeated 60–40. It went down in nearly every town in the state: in Cambridge we wiped it out almost four to one. On election night the No on 3 campaign held a packed victory party at the Park Plaza Hotel. We all cheered the sight of Jim Braude, the tall, cerebral advocate for progressive taxation, and Arthur Osborne, the cigar-smoking head of the state AFL-CIO, hugging each other and pledging that this was only the beginning.

But in Cambridge William Weld beat John Silber by four thousand votes; and statewide those liberals who decided that it would only hurt for a minute gave Weld his slim margin of victory.

Now, a year later, whatever visions of unity I had during the No on 3 campaign are long gone. We might as well have never defeated it. For Governor Weld, true to his word, has done everything in his power to abolish the state government that 60 percent of the people voted to maintain in some viable form. Prison labor has been discussed as a substitute for some state jobs in order to save on costs. Entire cities like Chelsea have been allowed to go bankrupt, and the first task of Weld's appointed receiver will be to break Chelsea's union contracts. Weld wants to deny general relief, the last resort of the destitute, to people in drug treatment, to ex-offenders, to people forty-five and older with no recent work experience—to anyone who isn't physically disabled or a child. As I write, the Weld administration is trying to eliminate the dependents allowance from unemployment benefits, while in some carpenter's locals unemployment is 75 percent. The other day there was a rally at City Hall Plaza for an extension of benefits. I asked a friend who went what the crowd was like.

"They were pretty quiet," he said. "Mostly laid-off construction workers. The people you'd expect to be free on a weekday." □

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Richard L. Trumka

ON BECOMING A MOVEMENT

Rethinking Labor's Strategy

Not long ago I was told about a debate raging among the top political organizers of one of the larger AFL-CIO affiliates, a union that traditionally sent sizable delegations to the Democratic National Convention and is easily capable of doing the same again. But now the question it was facing wasn't whether the union had the resources to get its members on delegate slates. Instead, the question was whether it was even worth the time and expense. "Every four years we dump who knows how much money into sending people to the Democratic convention," one of the union's seasoned political organizers observed, "but the *only* thing we ever seem to get out of it is the right to say, 'Look how many people we had there.' "

Though long characterized—even by some of its friends—as slow to accept change, labor is engaged in an almost unprecedented reexamination of its political strategies. And for good reason. For unions representing manufacturing workers, 1991 may be remembered as the year when many of labor's "best friends" in Congress abandoned the cause of protecting American jobs to put negotiation of a U.S.-Mexico Free Trade Agreement on a fast track. In the public sector, state and local government employees have seen scores of Democratic officials—some whose very careers were financed through union campaigns—respond to budget shortfalls by scapegoating government workers rather than by challenging low corporate tax rates.

Ironically this is occurring at a time when organized labor is raising and contributing more money than ever before—one published estimate even says that eleven of the wealthiest union PACs (Political Action Committees) contributed between $2 million and $5 million each over the last ten years. However, despite this, our influence in Congress and in the state capitals continues to decline. Even on questions where Democratic support might have once been a given—banning the "permanent replacements" of striking workers, for example—union lobbyists often find legislators they had endorsed nearly as intractable as those they'd opposed.

Today we long for the "good old days" when Democrats took their leadership from veteran New Dealers and when the image of Bobby Kennedy marching shoulder to shoulder with Cesar Chavez convinced us that the coalition forged by John L. Lewis and Franklin D. Roosevelt had become a permanent fixture in American life. But on the eve of the 1992 campaign the Democratic party of the Humphreys and Kennedys—a party that could champion farm workers in Delano or sanitation workers in Memphis—is the stuff of 1960s nostalgia.

Today, organized labor faces an indifference bordering on contempt from a new generation of Democrats who grew up as children of the very middle class that young CIO organizers made possible a few decades before. Though their parents may have lived in the shadow of the Great Depression, these Democrats grew up in a time of relative prosperity. While touched by the struggle for civil rights, they were more deeply moved by the threat of the draft and a faraway war.

To many of this generation of Democrats, the labor movement was less a vehicle for economic security—let alone social justice—

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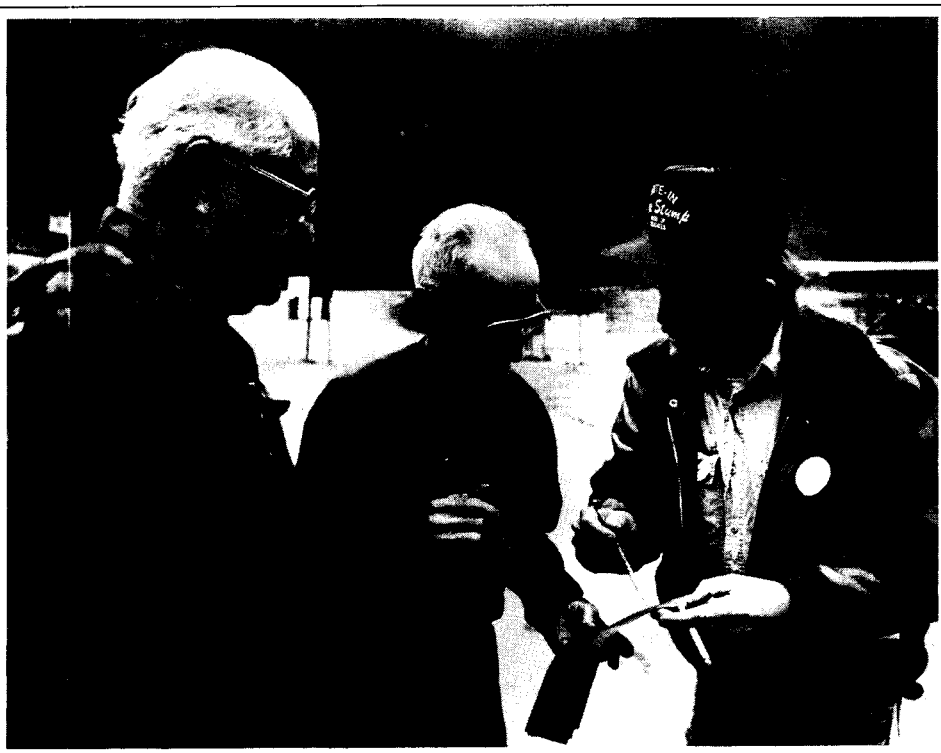
than it was Lyndon Johnson's silent partner. Just as surely as the Great Society died somewhere in the jungles of Vietnam, the possibility for igniting trade union passions among America's young was lost as images of prowar hardhats charging antiwar marchers filled television screens. Somewhat to the left on questions of civil liberties, defense, and the environment, but far closer to corporate America when it comes to economic policy, they are cultural liberals who offer a politics vaguely reminiscent of 1980 presidential candidate John Anderson.

For much of organized labor, rethinking the relationship between America's unions and these Democrats has meant adopting tough criteria for withholding union support from politicians who refuse to back our agenda. At a time when many local Democratic party "organizations" are barely able to mobilize a roomful of volunteers to mail out a list of endorsed candidates, the threat of withholding access to labor campaign dollars, union-operated phone banks, and other campaign services is hardly without its implications. However, while the radical right believes labor's political campaign dollars are vital to the survival of the Democratic party, fewer of those on the receiving end behave as if this were true. And for good reason. Last year alone labor's PAC contributions to U.S. House candidates totaled nearly $35 million, but those dollars become chump change compared to the $58 million dished out by corporate PACs and the additional $44 million from trade association and professional PACs. When the average U.S. Senate incumbent must raise $20,000 *each week* to wage a credible reelection bid, few candidates can be expected to turn their backs on corporate interests. Raising the political price for our support might be enough to corral wayward Democrats under a system where campaign expenditures were sharply limited, but not when corporate interests stand ready to replace the dollars we withhold. We could literally bankrupt the entire labor movement and still be unable to match the dollars available to corporate America.

Faced with the seemingly hopeless task of reviving the Democratic party's commitment to



Stump write-in campaign *United Mine Workers of America*

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working people, a growing though still small number of union activists are calling for the creation of a labor party. Pointing to the successes of Canada's New Democrats, supporters say that America's "old Democrats" can also be elbowed aside in favor of candidates who will stand up for our issues. Advocates for this approach make a compelling case, but there's another strategy that incorporates much of the vision of labor-party supporters. It's an approach the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) and a growing number of unions are putting to work today: it's called running our own as Democrats and, when necessary, as independents. That was the lesson UMWA members learned a couple of years ago when, in the midst of the union's strike at the Pittston Coal Group, union activists decided to take on Don McGlothin, Sr., heir to one of southwest Virginia's most distinguished political families and a twenty-year incumbent in the state's House of Delegates. But McGlothin, like many Democrats, was more than content to gamble that his incumbency and poor Republican organization would allow him to avoid the region's most controversial issue: Pittston's drive to deprive coal-mining families of their health benefits.

We launched a campaign for Jackie Stump—a coal miner and UMWA International Executive Board member. Though Stump's write-in campaign, begun a bare three weeks before the election, could have been one more doomed protest candidacy, it became something very different. Backed with the resources of the UMWA, Stump's campaign produced sophisticated television and radio spots hitting hard on the "populist" themes of protecting workers rights and family health care. Meanwhile, rank-and-file union activists mounted an aggressive door-to-door canvassing drive and organized the same phone bank operations unions traditionally place at the disposal of Democratic candidates. The result was that Stump easily defeated McGlothin by a greater than two-to-one majority.

Stump's campaign demonstrated that labor can successfully employ the same techniques as any other campaign organization. It was a lesson reinforced last year by the election of UMWA members to state legislatures in Alabama, West Virginia, and Illinois, and by the remarkable gubernatorial campaign of Paul Hubbert, a leader of Alabama's largest teacher's union, who came within a hairbreadth of unseating Republican incumbent Guy Hunt.

But the experience of labor's candidates tells us something else, too. It's that our message—a hard-edged economic populism considered "too strong" by most social liberals—can succeed among low- and middle-income white voters. Polling conducted by Garin-Hart Strategic Research in the wake of David Duke's chillingly strong 1990 Louisiana U.S. Senate race underscores why. According to the survey of 612 white Louisiana voters, racial issues consistently were of less concern to Duke supporters than their sense that government had abandoned them. By a 56 percent to 28 percent margin, pollsters found Duke supporters who are open to voting Democratic blame the wealthy and big business over minorities and welfare recipients for the squeeze on middle-class families. "As a matter of sheer political arithmetic," the pollsters conclude, "these results suggest there is substantially more advantage for Democrats in championing the middle-class interests than in seeking to capture the anti-welfare, anti-minority message from David Duke."

It should be little surprise that of the arguments used against Duke in the 1991 Louisiana gubernatorial contest it was the threat of additional job loss that appears to have moved middle-class white voters to support Democrat Edwin Edwards. Ironically, the economic hardship that motivated many of Duke's white middle-class backers finally led many to vote for Edwards.

However, the best example of the power of economic populism—and organized labor's role in advancing it—may be in the election of Harris Wofford of Pennsylvania to the U.S. Senate. Though today it's accepted as a given that Wofford successfully campaigned on a platform that could have been written at the convention of any U.S. industrial union, even more significant was the fact that long before Richard Thornburgh even entered the Senate race, Pennsylvania unions dug in their heels behind Harris Wofford and his populism when many party professionals advocated a far more

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cautious approach and, in some cases, even another candidate.

With its insistence that labor be more than loyal foot soldiers for party officials, the Wofford campaign stands as a rarity: an effort that successfully spoke to the problems affecting workers and accepted leadership from workers' unions. Living up to the challenge of making campaigns like Wofford's more than the exception to the rule involves making significant changes in how we view ourselves and labor's mission.

On paper the labor movement seems ideally suited to lead a populist insurgency in the Democratic party, but the reality is far less encouraging. On too many occasions organized labor, unable to reach any kind of consensus, comes down decisively on both sides of an issue. Though Connecticut labor leaders successfully pressed legislators to launch a state income tax, more than 45,000 residents denounced it at a rally financed in part by a key local of one of the state's largest private-sector unions. Similar conflicts occur routinely whenever teachers and construction unions battle over property tax abatements for local building projects or when a privatization proposal that would cost jobs for one union could just as easily create them for another. Though it obviously contradicts some of the AFL-CIO-bashing in vogue among organized labor's well-intentioned critics, the confusion that sometimes characterizes our political strategy isn't due to the AFL-CIO exercising too much authority as much as it is the result of the fact that, as a federation, it has too little.

Many union leaders have responded to our declining membership not by exploring our movement's ability to adapt and change but by invoking the image of a pendulum that's bound to come back our way. The chief challenge we face is to define ourselves as more than servicing institutions that negotiate contracts by becoming organizations that speak to a broader range of worker concerns, both on and off the job. Walter Reuther was prophetic when, in 1967, he observed that "a new concept of unionization" needed to take shape in the wake of the farm worker organizing campaigns in California. Calling the approach "community unionism," Reuther suggested that "properly nurtured and motivated, it can spread across the face of the nation, changing the social character of the inner city structure, providing the poor with their own self-sufficient economic organization."

Examples of this new kind of unionism remain few and far between, but its success may offer new hope for labor's resurgence. In the UMWA, it's meant helping to establish Miners For Democracy (MFD) as part of the union's Powder River Basin organizing drive in Wyoming. Through MFD, nonunion miners have an opportunity to join with the UMWA as associate members where they have both access to the union's resources and a vehicle to make their voices heard in local politics.

But it's not just the UMWA that has established such programs.

- In Cincinnati, the local AFL-CIO labor council launched its own community organizing program under the banner of the National Association of Working Americans. With some two thousand members, the group is spearheading local support for a state universal health care plan.
- In New York, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union established a community center in the Williamsburg neighborhood in Brooklyn where area residents, often Latino immigrants, can take classes in English as a second language or receive assistance on social service problems.
- In Boston, the Hotel and Restaurant Employees last year pioneered in establishing a housing trust fund that has already put a hundred families into new homes. Last year, the AFL-CIO launched a similar program nationally.

Approaches like these, still more the exception than the rule, offer a passing glimpse into a new kind of labor movement: one that can exercise political strength based not on dollars but on grass-roots support. □

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Alice Kessler-Harris and Bertram Silverman

BEYOND INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM

Into Politics, Into the Communities

American unions have traditionally responded to changing circumstances. If sometimes belatedly, they have transformed themselves over the past one hundred years from craft-centered organizations with guildlike characteristics to powerful enterprises for organizing mass-production and semiskilled workers into huge industrial unions. But now they seem to have stumbled. Faced with dramatic reductions in the proportion of workers who produce goods, union leaders are confronted with the task of organizing a new generation of service workers. So far, the results have not been auspicious. And public sympathy with trade unionism is at a low ebb.

How are membership and confidence to be restored? Once again unions are called upon to speak to the needs and interests of a changing work force. Formidable obstacles lie in the way. These include an unsympathetic government and increasing hostility from business, as well as the continuing transformation of the American economy and the structure of the labor force. But labor has overcome such obstacles before. It can overcome them again if it gives voice to a coherent set of programs and values that can reach the new service worker and command the support of the larger society.

In the past the role of the union, as a class-based institution, has been to articulate a concept of solidarity. Where the dominant American ideology asserted a faith in individual advancement, the trade union movement saw limited job options and unequal power in the workplace. Only collective action, unionists believed, could improve the quality of life of ordinary people. Yet in recent years, unionists have backed away from the collective values they once nurtured in an effort to promote individual well-being instead.

The great historical swings in the labor movement illustrate why and how this happened. When the American labor movement consolidated itself in the late nineteenth century, it was guided by the interests of skilled, white, male craft workers who saw themselves as independent artisans. Threatened by a loss of autonomy at work and then by the advance of mass production techniques, craft workers banded together in an effort to control the pace of change and to maintain some influence in new manufacturing processes. To do so, they shed ideas of self-employment and began to associate with the new American Federation of Labor (AFL).

AFL unions saw workers in the various crafts and trades as wage workers. To ensure that they could pursue their skills with dignity, unions sought to control hiring, training, and standards of quality. Many craft unions were tied to immigrant communities, where they bridged the work interests of members and the larger community. They occupied a male-dominated world, focused on male pride in the workplace and male support of the home. And because they excluded most of the new semiskilled operatives as well as virtually all of the unskilled, they included few women or people of color.

In the end, the labor movement they created could protect neither the craft workers' traditional work habits nor their control over the process of work; but it did succeed in maintaining the craft worker's sense of dignity. It struggled for a "family" wage, a limit on the number of working hours, and the ability to

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confront irrational work rules. Faced with a rapidly consolidating industrial sector, AFL president Samuel Gompers adopted a two-pronged strategy. He agreed that the purpose of business was to make profits, but insisted on the right of workers to a reasonable standard of living. Though many have criticized this historic compromise, Gompers's acknowledgment that the dignity of workers was rooted in industry's willingness to share profits helped to found the first sustained labor movement in the United States.

By the 1930s, as industry developed new techniques for maximizing production and efficiency, both the issues and the workers changed. Mass production created new groups of industrial workers whose skills were easily replaceable but whose numbers gave them a certain amount of power. Still predominantly white and male, the industrial work force now had a greater share of immigrants and their children, of women, and of people of color. Less concerned with skill or craft issues in their increasingly routinized workplaces, this new generation of workers demanded job security through seniority, wanted protection against speed-ups, and sought wages with which to purchase an increasing variety of consumer goods.

Propelled to meet these needs, the labor movement split. Goaded by the new Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), the AFL slowly altered a long-standing hostility to government intervention on behalf of workers and, at first reluctantly, then with increasing enthusiasm, supported programs that would protect all Americans from the pains of unemployment, old age, disability, and desertion. A broad range of depression-buffeted people applauded these new efforts. Union pressure, as historian Richard Hofstadter noted, gave the Democratic party a social democratic flavor never before felt in American politics. These economic objectives were not immediately apparent, partly because they were consistent with a growing popular Keynesian consensus that linked workers' higher wages and job security with sustained economic growth and prosperity. But in the end they enabled the labor movement to develop what UAW president Walter Reuther later called "a whole new middle class." Through the 1960s the wages of unionized workers outpaced those of the nonunionized. They provided workers with access to a middle-class world of consumption and lifestyle, including suburban housing, paid vacations, old-age pensions, and options for educating their children. Success rekindled the possibility of achieving the American Dream. Higher standards of living seemed to open opportunity to women as well, encouraging them to enter the labor force in support of family life.

This generation of workers sought the traditional satisfactions of work outside the workplace, hoping that enhanced incomes would buy them improvement in the quality of their lives. If work became more routinized and less intrinsically satisfying, more affluent working-class families could nevertheless believe that they were participating in the American dream of unbounded opportunity. In effect, they rejected "Solidarity Forever" for the strident individualism of Frank Sinatra's "I Did It My Way." Paradoxically, then, the very success of unions in winning higher wages led workers to interests transcending the workplace concerns on which trade unions had thrived. Unions found they were losing touch with their members once they left the factory gates. The decline of the labor movement had begun.

The internal tensions of unionism increased in the 1960s and 1970s. Continuing to seek a middle-class lifestyle for their members, unions tried to achieve the appearance of upward economic mobility within a job context that was still circumscribed. In the skilled craft unions the result was job protectionism that subjected them to attack by a growing civil rights movement and reduced the credibility of the labor movement as a moral voice for less privileged workers.

By the 1970s, white workers worried more about the "new immigrants," frequently black and Hispanic, who threatened the "stability" of their neighborhoods. Having created a "private" welfare system that provided social benefits equivalent to Western European standards, they resented the poor whose welfare seemed to promise higher taxes that would

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undermine their living standards. Well-paid male unionists resisted changes in lifestyle called forth by the need for dual incomes and working wives.

The problems this created became apparent in the 1980s. Having lost touch with the larger sense of collective responsibility that had given unions their moral voice, union leaders found themselves unable to mobilize a working class. Instead they bewailed the appearance of an increasingly unequal society whose more privileged members resisted sharing with the working and nonworking poor. Industrial unionism, which remained job-centered, could no longer speak to the concerns of new and more diverse organized workers whose political passions were more readily mobilized outside rather than inside the workplace.

The 1984 election pointed up the unions' loss of a moral voice. A generation after Walter Reuther announced the advent of the middle-class worker, his successor as UAW President, Douglas Fraser, lamented the conservative middle-income automobile worker who voted for Ronald Reagan. Forty-five percent of white male unionists in that election voted for Reagan, compared to only 5 percent of black male workers. The shifting political perspectives of these workers restricted union leaders from advancing a social democratic agenda. As Douglas Fraser commented sadly, leaders could not move too far ahead of their membership.

But just as the transformation of the work force from craft to industrial production challenged the union movement to organize in new ways, to seek new goals, and to form new political alliances, so postindustrial capitalism requires a new direction for trade unions. To understand that new social reality, unions must come to grips with what has permanently changed. Fundamental to these changes are shifting notions of family and community.

First, class consciousness provides a poor basis for organizing workers. In an earlier period, despite racial, ethnic, and gender divisions, workers shared a common economic experience that reinforced class identity. Most workers were poor and tended to live together or in contiguous neighborhoods. Even those who were somewhat better off found their life chances limited because their world was segregated by residence, education, and income. Today the majority of workers are not poor, and many share neighborhoods and schools with middle-class professionals.

Recent stagnation of real family income has not changed this new social reality. Workers are an integral part of the consumer society and have accommodated to its values. Consequently, work no longer defines a worker's class identity in such a way as to encapsulate all other major social and political issues. Like the unemployed white auto workers who voted for Ronald Reagan in 1984, most workers now are likely to construct their political attitudes in response to experiences outside the workplace.

The increasingly female composition of the postindustrial workforce and the accompanying growth of female membership in unions constitutes a second factor in the changing social world. In the 1970s and early 1980s, an increase in union membership among women partially compensated for the decline among men. By some estimates, about two-thirds of new members are female, with women now accounting for 37 percent of all members—up from 24 percent in the mid seventies. Though women have been in the workplace for some time, bringing the family and its problems with them, their increasing presence in unions has encouraged attention to the connection between work and family life. The dual-income family poses crucial questions of how to care for children, of pregnancy and parenting, and of the quality of leisure time that directly affect the workplace and that frequently require governmental action.

Women who moved from unpaid household work to paid work fueled the shift from an industrial to a service economy. These were not, by and large, women who moved from industry to services. Rather, they were married women or single parents entering the labor force for the first time. Dependence on the wages of the female wage-earner, partnered or single, has permitted many working-class families to enter the middle-income world and find greater economic security. But dependence on the incomes of female wage earners also ties work more closely to family. Total family time

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devoted to wage work has increased dramatically. Indeed, families are working as much today as they did during the nineteenth century, and the women in them are facing time pressures that reopen questions about work and family life.

The service economy raises new issues about the quality of life, particularly about the capacity of individuals or families to glean satisfaction from individual consumption. As the price of mass produced goods has fallen, they have been made available to ordinary workers. Autos, televisions, VCRs, and microwave ovens can be consumed individually without undermining the quality of the product. But the spread of these "democratic goods" offers only limited satisfaction. The good life in a postindustrial world also requires access to good neighborhoods and to such community and social services as health care, education, recreational facilities, and sanitation. Their quality depends on how those services are collectively produced, distributed, and consumed. And this in turn rests on such values as cooperation, trust, loyalty, honesty, and generosity.

Finally, the function of the corporation and its responsibilities to the larger society have changed. As technology and international competition shift mass production industries to the developing countries, the significance of assembly line workers among labor's membership recedes. At the same time, the use of computers enables industry to organize new and more flexible modes of production that use part-time and immigrant workers. The "human resource managers" of America's most competitive industries speak today about the values of cooperation and participation to enhance worker productivity and innovation. In their view, much of the distinction between management and labor no longer applies, and traditional unions have become irrelevant. The resulting changes encourage new forms of managerial control that threaten to marginalize unions. In the global economy, which relies on highly mobile capital, they threaten the hard-won fringe benefits that constituted the private insurance systems of fortunate workers. When corporations fail to meet their social responsibilities, they undermine the stability of communities, subvert trust, and weaken the social services on which quality of life increasingly depends. These issues loom ever larger as government reduces its social welfare functions and family, church, and other voluntary associations struggle in vain to fill the gap.

A major result of these changes is that a spontaneous unionism ignited by class identity can no longer work. Nor can traditional collective bargaining as it emerged in the 1940s meet the challenges of the service economy. Work may still be the place where unions organize to defend workers, but in the new reality the main way forward for unions must be through politics. For only through politics can the problems of postindustrial America be addressed, and only through politics can trade unions reach the larger constituency they need in order to change both their fortunes and their public image. At the very least politics is the only way that the public can learn about the connection between unionism and democracy and therefore change the legal environment to one that nurtures unionism.

What needs to be done? The central need for labor in the postindustrial era is once again to become the voice of the majority of working people. If the old craft union responded to the needs of a skilled and relatively insular male worker and the industrial union spoke to the desire of the mass production worker for a higher standard of living, the unionism of the 1990s has little choice but to address the "quality of life" issues raised by a heterogeneous group of twentieth-century workers. Unions were strategically decisive in the development of the New Deal and post–New Deal programs because they placed the interests of their members within the context of the larger society. Today unions need to assess their new constituency in the light of economic and social changes and open-mindedly explore the kinds of social policies that will meet the new needs of a transformed working class. Around those new social policies—around the construction of a new welfare state, if you will—trade unions have the opportunity to win a broader constituency. This is not a radical

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proposal. Rather, it builds on the initiatives that some unions have already begun to take.

Reclaiming the moral authority of labor's voice will require unions to involve themselves in new areas. Primary among these is designing services for the modern family that have long been abandoned to impersonal bureaucracies and politicians. Unions have already responded to the influx of women by placing such issues as parental leave, flexible benefits, pay equity, and reduced hours of work on their agendas. In 1988–89 the Coalition of Labor Union Women featured family issues in a year-long campaign to encourage unions toward imaginative solutions. But the demand for new benefits, whether provided by government or employers, is not enough. Unions must mediate between family and employer, providing members with such necessities as child-care, counseling services, and access to social services. Recognizing that what constitutes a "family" is a work-force issue, they will participate in redefining it. For example, they might renegotiate benefit packages tailored to married couples so as to acknowledge the existence of some three million gay and lesbian parents as well as countless nonmarried couples with and without children.

Unions must also turn their attention to the communities in which workers reside. This will become increasingly necessary as the expansion of the service sector, where women are most often employed, moves the terrain of struggle from the workplace to the community. Unlike the old worker who dealt primarily with machines, the new one deals with people. Her sense of dignity resides not only in the conditions under which she works but in her ability to serve her clients effectively. As in her work life the emphasis moves from the quantity of goods produced to the quality of the services she can provide, so in her private life the emphasis shifts from the quantity of goods she can buy to the quality of her life and that of her family. The disturbing questions faced by the new worker involve not only how to increase income or resolve work-related disputes but how families will survive the hurdles of schooling, health care, environment, and sometimes the violence and drugs that endanger neighborhood life.

All workers depend on a variety of neighborhood amenities and supports, and ultimately on government support to provide economic security. How to improve the quality of those services and distribute them fairly must become one of the central problems for unions if they are to thrive in postindustrial capitalism. Though these problems cannot be resolved by collective agreements negotiated at the bargaining table, failure to address them makes unions seem largely irrelevant to millions of actual and potential members. It also impoverishes a large sector of the public whose voice trade unions could effectively represent.

Dissolving the barrier between the public and the worker must become one of the unions' major tasks. Unions that can link workers who provide social services with the consumers of those services create a natural alliance. To do so, unions must be closely involved with their members in such issues as education, housing, poverty, and crime. Some unions are beginning to work on this. For example, teachers unions link wages and working conditions to the improvement of education, and social service workers link their organizations to underprivileged clients. Others, such as the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU), have begun to set up community offices to address nonwork concerns directly.

The process of community involvement requires unions to participate in creating what the historian Eric Hobsbawm called "social fronts" that link workers and their unions to community groups that address family and community problems. Transcending the private insurance system that trade unions helped create over the last fifty years, unions should make efforts to reach the unorganized. The now-defunct Progressive Alliance attempted in the late 1970s to address such social issues as plant closings. More recently, the AFL-CIO has begun to offer individuals who do not belong to bargaining units alternative ways of identifying with a union. In the spirit of these proposals, community involvement accepts responsibility for a broader range of issues than

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those encompassed by the workplace. This approach offers unions a credible voice in healing racial divisions and in bridging the gulf that isolates the poor from mainstream workers.

Finally, unions need to challenge narrow definitions of corporate profitability and responsibility, insisting that governments treat corporations as social institutions whose activities loom well beyond their immediate economic domain. Daniel Bell suggested this in his 1973 *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*. The corporation, he argued, consisted of "the management and the board of directors, operating as trustees for members of the enterprise as a whole—not just stockholders, but workers and consumers too—and with due regard to the interests of society as a whole." The model comes close to that of most Western European nations that typically hold managers and boards of trustees responsible for negotiating social issues. It finds an echo in political and social institutions such as municipal governments, colleges, foundations, and churches that have already begun to use their positions as stockholders to influence corporate policies. Unions have successfully used pressure on trustees to settle major strikes. Within the AFL-CIO executive council a subcommittee led by the president of the ACTWU, Jack Sheinkman, has begun to develop a theory of "stake holders" rights within a corporation. This theory holds that job holders and residents of the communities where plants are located have a stake in the corporation no smaller than that of share holders. Nor is this concept entirely inconsistent with the long-term interests of modern corporations that have increasingly discovered that productivity depends on the effectiveness of local schools and on family stability.

Industrial unionism earned attention by accepting managerial prerogatives in exchange for rising real wages and good fringe benefits. The trade-off worked reasonably well in the forties, fifties, and sixties. But to cling to it today will place unions in increasingly marginal positions. Already many liberals seem to have tacitly accepted their absence from the social debate.

The key to a new trade-union strategy lies in articulating new definitions of social responsibility that mediate between community and individual rights, between family responsibility and women's rights, between corporate social responsibility and property rights, between fairness and individual merit. Unions that take on these challenges leave the industrial union phase behind, at least in part. Working with groups within and outside the corporations, they develop a new conception of the welfare state that will once again connect the labor movement to the larger society. □

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THE EDITORS □

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Jack Metzgar

"EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT" PLANS

And the Philosophy of Labor

At a recent educational conference of the Machinists union (IAM), I asked several groups of local officers and staff how many of their locals were involved in "employee involvement" (EI) or "labor-management cooperation" (LMC) programs. An overwhelming majority said they were.

This is remarkable because the IAM is one of the few unions that has had a clear, well thought-out position on these kinds of programs. Its position is to avoid them because even when not management scams they undermine the basic principles of unionism, blurring the "us vs. them" mentality that is essential to vigorous, militant unionism. It is a position that the recently retired Machinist President William Winpisinger articulated forcefully for nearly two decades.

In contrast to the official union position, local and regional leaders expressed a wide range of views about worker-management programs. Some felt the programs in their workplaces *were* undermining the union and they would get rid of them if they could. Others believed that some of the programs offered opportunities for the union to do things it couldn't do through traditional mechanisms. Most thought the programs were fairly harmless.

I have had similar encounters with local leaders and staff from two other unions that had initially developed clear and well thought-out positions on this subject: the Auto Workers (UAW) and the Communications Workers (CWA). The UAW and CWA were not only supportive of these programs; they were enthusiastic and had initially demanded them from management at General Motors and (the former) A.T.&T. Their official positions were that these programs could benefit both workers and management by winning new levels of dignity for workers while producing shop-floor ideas that would improve the functioning of the business. Irving Bluestone, a UAW vice president now retired, has been equally clear and forceful over the years in arguing this view.

Get a dozen auto or telephone workers together, however—workers who have experienced these programs for more than a decade—and you'll get the same range of opinions that I found among the Machinists. Rare are either enthusiasts or resisters. Most common is a conflicted (and often confusing) recitation of pros and cons.

There is more here than just a healthy diversity of views. There's a basic gap between theory and practice, no matter which theory a union embraces on this subject. And there's a fundamental confusion in what used to be called *the philosophy of labor*. What is unusual about the Machinists and the Auto Workers is that their leaders have taken clear, though opposing, positions on this subject. Most unions have simply left their locals to respond to management initiatives as best they can. Nor are the conflicting views on this subject between left and right in the labor movement. On most issues the Auto Workers and Machinists are clearly in the progressive wing. Winpisinger and Bluestone were among the few labor leaders whose views were explicitly informed by democratic socialist traditions.

In the last decade worker-management programs have proliferated in both union and nonunion workplaces. Though union experience with them has dulled both apprehension and enthusiasm, they continue to pose impor-

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tant theoretical and practical issues. As important as what these programs are actually doing is the interpretive framework through which they are viewed. This framework is controlled for the most part neither by managements nor by unions but by third parties—academics, journalists, and, above all, by EI/LMC "consultants" who are selling their services. A bureau in the Reagan-Bush Department of Labor plays a role in managing this interpretive framework by providing funds for research and educational activities.

On the subject of "employee involvement" or "labor-management cooperation," there is such a confusion of words (and initials) as to daunt even the most determined language analyst. The same program can be called by four different names; what in one place is "employee involvement" (EI) is at another "labor-management cooperation" (LMC). On the other hand, substantially different programs are called the same thing; some "team concept" programs are just like the vast majority of "employee involvement" or "quality of worklife" (QWL) programs, while others are nearly the exact opposite of EI and QWL. Various workplaces like to show their "creativity" by coming up with new names for standard programs. One Blue Cross/Blue Shield office in Chicago calls its program "the Revolution"!

Essential to these programs is some sort of *small group talk process* where management solicits workers' suggestions for improving the labor process. Usually workers are given time off the job to assemble in a small group to discuss their ideas with management.

The focus of these shop-floor discussions varies. The first generation of programs was usually called "quality of worklife" and the groups were instructed to talk about "anything and everything that comes up." Usually these groups generated ideas for improving the environment—painting the walls, better ventilation, keeping rest rooms stocked with paper towels. Another group of early programs was adapted from the Japanese. Called "quality circles," these focused on ways to improve product quality. Since then, programs have had endless variations. Increasing productivity is almost always a management goal.

The overall record of EI-type programs in achieving their goals is unimpressive. But there are a growing number of cases where an EI-type program has achieved dramatic results, sometimes saving a plant that had faced extinction. What's important here is the interpretive framework for explaining why these programs succeed *when they do succeed.* Journalists, consultants, government agencies, and academics pick through a growing catalog of dramatic success stories, arguing about the importance of this or that aspect in achieving success. But they all seem to agree on two propositions:

1. Whatever else is involved in a successful program, the necessary condition of success is that labor and management cooperate with each other instead of fighting each other.
2. To fully benefit from EI-type programs, both sides have to overcome the debilitating effects of adversarialism and therefore substantially transform labor relations as they have traditionally been practiced in the United States.

Andy Banks and I have argued in several different forums that both these propositions are false, labeling them an "ideology of cooperationism." Although at some level management has to cooperate with its workers for one of these programs to be successful, the mere fact of cooperation by itself achieves nothing. What is essential is the *participation* of workers in management decisions from which they have been traditionally excluded.

In the current context, it's hard to win a hearing for this view outside the labor movement. Thus, it is essential to begin with the history of today's worker-management programs.

The key idea behind the employee involvement programs was articulated in 1942 by Steelworker staffers Clinton Golden and Harold Ruttenberg. In their classic *The Dynamics of Industrial Democracy*, the "Principle of Union-Management Relations #32" is "Management's assumption of sole responsibility for productive efficiency actually prevents the attainment of maximum output."

In the 1940s and early 1950s, unions forced managements in major industries to accept most of Golden and Ruttenberg's Principles 1

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through 31, which dealt with the mechanics of bargaining and administering contracts, including the establishment of steward systems. But in a highly class-conscious way, Big Business management drew the line at Principles #32 through 35, declaring a "right to manage" that they said the Steelworkers, Auto Workers, and other industrial unions were trying to undermine.

Golden and Ruttenberg called for "union-management *cooperation* [emphasis added] to reduce costs, eliminate waste, increase productive efficiency, and improve quality" (Principle #34). They argued: "Union-management cooperation tends to make management more efficient and unions more cost-conscious, thereby improving the competitive position of a business enterprise and increasing the earnings of both workers and owners" (Principle #35). But they also advocated a "practical program that provides workers with effective direct *participation* (emphasis added) in the creative phases of management" (Principle #34).

Auto and steel management saw "union-management cooperation" as a Trojan Horse for "worker participation" and "worker participation in the creative phases of management" as a threat to their control not only of the workplace (which, of course, every word of any labor contract threatens some aspect of) but also of their business enterprise as a whole. No matter how unionists worded it, this was "insulting" to management: "productive efficiency" is what managers are expected to be most expert in.

In order to maintain both their control and self-esteem, American managements (first in steel and auto and then elsewhere) drew the line at Principle #32. They were willing to pay a price for drawing the line there. Wage increases, cost-of-living adjustments, pensions, and health insurance—these could be granted (when workers were mobilized to struggle for them), but only if unions would cede any claim to management's right to "sole responsibility for productive efficiency." Though carrying on an important rearguard action around work rules and job classifications, unions accepted this trade-off and incorporated it into the "management clause" of most union contracts.

Thirty years later, in the early 1970s, business-school academics had assembled a formidable body of evidence that supported Golden and Ruttenberg. In 1972 the Nixon administration's Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW), in its report *Work in America,* even argued that Scientific Management and its fanatical attempt to control workers' every move was a main culprit in undermining the "health, education and welfare" of all Americans. In the unkindest cut of all, the HEW report presented substantial evidence that top-down Scientific Management "bossing" was undermining productivity growth.

Also in the early 1970s, partly driven by a strike wave the likes of which the United States had not seen since the late 1940s and partly by academics' fascination with the young Marx's theory of worker alienation, many leftists drew on the academic critique of Scientific Management that had begun in the 1950s and advocated programs of "workplace democracy," "worker participation," and "workers' control." Many practical unionists like Irving Bluestone seized on this concern with "blue-collar blues" and "worker alienation" to revive an aspect of Golden and Ruttenberg's Principles. Under the slogan of "quality of work-life," which the HEW report had focused on, these unionists helped implement programs that they hoped would help relieve workers of the terrible physical, psychological, and social effects the HEW report had shown Scientific Management, and "bossing" in general, to be responsible for. Other unionists, like Winpisinger, were skeptical of the humanitarian possibilities in management's allowing workers some input into workplace decision making; they were sure that management would inevitably use QWL to undermine other rock-solid aspects of unionism like the steward system, work rules, and job classifications.

But the debate within the labor movement was a mere sideshow compared to the way managements reacted to the business-school critique (led by Harvard and M.I.T.) of their fundamental practices. The critique was, essentially, that management's fanatical attempt to control every aspect of work was actively suppressing the insights and knowledge of

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workers doing the work. No matter how it was said, this business-school critique called for radical changes in management practices, but the words that were used in advancing the cause of "workplace reform" were important. "Workers' control," for example, could not win management's ear. "Workplace democracy," like its predecessor "industrial democracy," made managers' teeth grind. The whole presentation had to both make the point embodied in Golden and Ruttenberg's Principle #32—that management had to draw on the insight and knowledge of the people who actually do the work if it wanted to improve productivity and product quality—while at the same time making management feel comfortable that this could be done without its losing control or too much damage to its self-esteem.

As the first generation of consultants worked with unions and managements in developing pilot projects, it became clear that both sides had anxieties about where these programs would go in the long run. Management and union leadership each feared losing control as these small groups of workers and managers were encouraged to generate proposals for workplace change. Unions, even where they were not skeptical of management's motives (which they usually were), feared that workers in these small groups would accidentally give away pieces of the contract, establishing new precedents on work practices that it had sometimes taken decades to win.

A series of safeguards and protections evolved to address management and union concerns. The consultants developed training programs where workers and managers got together to go through exercises to learn how to engage in "joint problem-solving." Such training is weighted toward management perspectives while engaging in many exercises designed to break down lack of trust between the parties. The whole experience is supposed to develop a cooperative atmosphere. To protect the union contract, something called "the collective bargaining line" was drawn, prohibiting any discussion or action on any subject covered in the contract. This line has been subtly but routinely crossed, though not usually in ways that have major impacts on the union.

Such training programs tend to become exercises in "unlearning" the collective bargaining experience. In the EI/LMC world unionists were explicitly instructed on how to take off their "adversarial hat" and put on their "cooperative hat." The adversarial system of bargaining and administering contracts was not attacked as such, but over time it came to be devalued. Phrases like "going beyond collective bargaining," which had originally meant *adding* something to collective bargaining, came to mean "overcoming the debilitating effects of adversarialism." In this context, adversarialism was conceived of as "constant bickering and fighting," rather than as a formal system through which parties with opposing interests resolve their differences.

In this way, the original insight that management needed to learn from workers was either lost or deemphasized in favor of helping workers and managers get along with each other. And although the terms are often used as though they are synonymous, the overall emphasis has shifted from "employee *involvement*" to "labor-management *cooperation*." What began as a biting critique of management has been transformed into a sideswipe at adversarial unionism.

Other important shifts occurred as these programs evolved from pilot projects in the early 1970s to proliferation in the 1980s. Vestiges of the early 1970s concern with worker dissatisfaction, and with the impact of management bossing on the nation's health and welfare, have disappeared. Instead, the emphasis is now on how these programs can improve productivity and product quality in order to make American business more competitive. This shift is most clearly seen in the federal government's role in encouraging these programs. As the Reagan Department of Labor cut the budgets of the Occupational Safety & Health Administration, it gave increased support to the Bureau of Labor-Management Relations and Cooperative Programs.

Ironically, while this twisted evolution of what Golden and Ruttenberg initially saw as an important element in "industrial democracy" has successfully protected managements' control and self-esteem, it has made it almost impossible for these programs to increase productivity or improve competitiveness.

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The majority of existing EI-type programs achieve little or nothing. A recent study by Maryellen Kelley and Bennett Harrison—the most sophisticated and rigorous evaluation of these programs so far—found that most EI-type programs actually *reduce* productivity. This finding is largely consistent with other empirical surveys that attempt to measure the relation between EI/LMC and productivity. But more startling is their finding that the presence of a union in a workplace is much more important in increasing productivity than the presence of an EI/LMC program.*

As it becomes more available the Kelley-Harrison study should cause a rethinking of this entire subject. But sophisticated social science is not what is driving the proliferation of these programs in one workplace after another. What has caused all the excitement about EI-type programs is a number of success stories.

In the typical success story, productivity and/or product quality is dramatically improved (sometimes saving a plant that would otherwise have been closed), and workers and management both enjoy coming to work more than they ever did before. In this "win-win scenario," management gets improved productivity and/or quality. Workers get treated like intelligent human beings. And both benefit from the increased competitiveness of their enterprise.

Though often exaggerated, particularly in journalistic accounts, these success stories are genuinely moving. The problem is that the key to success in worker-management programs is never cooperation as such but always the genuine participation of workers in decisions from which they have been traditionally excluded. The evidence that EI-type programs have great *potential* for improving productivity and/or product quality has always been anecdotal. The vast majority of existing programs, whether in union or nonunion workplaces, are so heavily encrusted with protections to safeguard management's control and elf-esteem that little follows from them.

In contrast, the real success stories tend to come out of crisis situations where the union is much more aggressive in pursuing "participation in the creative phases of management." A plant or a department within a plant is threatened with being closed. A company is seeking one more round of concessions from the union in order to avoid bankruptcy. A public service is threatened with privatization by politicians looking for budget-cutting panaceas. With wages, standards, and jobs threatened, unions focus on forms of mismanagement they had previously tolerated.

In these situations, union leadership has been able to mobilize workers to produce ideas to turn the situation around, and management is more likely to implement proposals for change coming from the shop floor. Though consultants are often employed, urgency does not allow for a complete program of cooperationist training, and workers get more involved more quickly than in carefully prepared and planned EI efforts. Faced with a management threat to outsource an entire department, for example, UAW Local 686 at Harrison Radiator in Lockport, New York, needed only three weeks to develop more than twenty proposals for cost savings—only three of which were needed to save the department. The famous "cooperative period" between the Machinists and Eastern Air Lines (1984–85) was based on a union-initiated and union-led EI-type program that the union forced from management as a condition for yet another round of wage concessions. In an eighteen-month period, the Machinists came up with almost $80 million in cost savings that management, through a procedure established in the labor contract, had to implement. In these and other cases, the vast majority of savings are achieved outside of direct labor costs and as an alternative to cutting wages, standards, or jobs.

The findings of the Kelley-Harrison study dramatically reinforce this argument that an aggressive union—not cooperation per se—is the key to successful worker-management programs.

In more than a thousand plants Kelley and Harrison studied, EI programs are about one-third more effective when there is a union present than when there is not. In the branch plants of multiplant companies, those with unions and without EI programs are nearly

* Kelley and Harrison "Unions, Technology, and Labor-Management Cooperation," *Unions and Economic Competitiveness* (Sharpe Publishers, 1992).

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twice as productive as those with EI programs but without unions. Kelley-Harrison conclude: "the 'contentiousness' and give-and-take which characterizes the relationship between managers and workers in a unionized setting may actually be an advantage [for achieving productivity and efficiency]."

What this means is that an adversarial form of employee involvement has much greater potential for improving productive efficiency than existing EI programs. Some dramatic exceptions aside, managements will not stop their bossing—they will not learn to manage better—unless and until unions organize their members to make them. Most of the institutions of workplace governance that unions have fought for (seniority systems, union shops, grievance procedures, and a wide array of workplace rights) have had beneficial effects on management practices—beneficial for workers, for customers or clients, and for the economic prospects of the enterprise—though they have clearly decreased management's discretion, its power to boss. Worker participation programs that do not challenge management's "right to manage" will not succeed in achieving what management itself says it wants—a more productive and efficient workplace producing better quality products and services. □

dissent

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David Moberg

UNION BUSTING, PAST AND PRESENT

Charting an Old American Tradition

After fifteen years in the trenches, one union organizer summed up management's present attitude toward unions with tongue in cheek: "They're mean to us." As a description of the past decade, that's a grand understatement. A great many employers in the United States are determined to use whatever techniques they can not only to prevent union organization but also to destroy existing unions.

"Mean" hardly does justice to management tactics at Eastern Airlines, Pittston Coal, Greyhound, Phelps Dodge, the *New York Daily News*, International Paper, and many other industrial battlegrounds. Managers provoked these strikes and then brought in "permanent replacements" to break both the strike and the union.

Many managers are also trying to kill unions with kindness: when unionization threatens, they solicit worker opinions and beg workers to "give us another chance." They institute "quality circles," open-door policies, and peer-review boards for discipline. The high-tech firms may offer exercise programs, day care, and flexible work environments, especially for technical and professional employees.

Is management really more hostile now than in the past? Are U.S. employers different from those in other countries? Did unions bring the recent disasters upon themselves? Is it all Ronald Reagan's fault? Are the American people simply unsympathetic to unions?

For unions the 1980s were like the 1920s, a time of management assault, organizational collapse, proliferation of corporate alternatives, and a hostile culture enamored of "free-market" greed. Yet even in the 1920s unions were stronger than in the 1980s.

For some years after World War II there was a consensus among labor leaders and academics that labor relations had "matured." Management accepted unions in principle, while vigorously fighting them over contract issues. So argued believers in "industrial pluralism." Increasingly bureaucratized unions abandoned old notions of class struggle in favor of routine grievance procedures and collective bargaining.

Whether or not this description of the "mature" labor accord with capital was ever true, it is not now. In the mid eighties, just under half the managers in one survey said their *primary* labor relations goal was to be free of unions. Other surveys showed that in 1977 employers preferred constructive bargaining to union avoidance by two to one; but the reverse was true by 1985.

Management, like labor, is not monolithic: the history, culture, market conditions, and technological options of different corporations contribute to diverse ways of dealing with unions. Yet it is fair to say that despite the fashionable talk about cooperation, the dominant corporate agenda is avoidance of unions, by genteel means if possible, by brutal means if necessary. And despite hard times for unions throughout the industrial world, in no other advanced industrial country—with the partial exception of Margaret Thatcher's Britain—have corporate executives been as hostile to unions as in the United States.

Anti-union Popular Culture

The roots of this "American exceptionalism" on the part of management run deep, forming the complement to—and a formative influence

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on—the much more analyzed "exceptionalism" of American working-class consciousness. Contemporary management hostility to unions not only manifests itself over the picket line but also through popular culture, the law, and politics. It shapes—and distorts—the conduct of business itself, undermining the competitive character of the U.S. economy in the global market.

Anti-union analysts argue that unions are in trouble because they do a bad job of marketing a defective and outdated product that nobody wants to buy anymore. Even to the extent that this may be true, the language of consumer choice obscures, as it always does, the power relationships and history underlying these supposed freely expressed market preferences.

American workers, like those in Europe, organized their first unions in spite of conspiracy laws, court injunctions, private armies and spies, and at times the armed might of the government. Even if conflicts of labor and capital are seen as endemic to capitalism, there are nevertheless distinct national styles to both capitalism and its battles with labor. Historians have repeatedly emphasized the unusual virulence of American management's resistance to unions and how the establishment of both unions and the welfare state was relatively late and weak in the United States.

America's liberal tradition (including early suffrage for most white male workers), the absence of feudal remnants, the relative hostility to a strong state, and the republican ethos of equality among citizen artisans and farmers all contributed to the creation of an individualistic culture. Linked with strong beliefs in the rights of property, untempered by older aristocratic convictions about the responsibilities of the wealthy to the social whole, and with a celebration of the "free market," this individualistic culture helped to foster an extremely hostile view of unions.

American individualism also gave employers an ideological tool against unionism, as business historian Sanford Jacoby argues in a perceptive essay, "American Exceptionalism Revisited: The Importance of Management." Especially in the era after the Civil War, businessmen succeeded in casting entrepreneurs as the embodiment of American liberty. The powerful myth of the "self-made man" legitimated both the business owner's total control over his enterprise and the freedom of laissez-faire competition. Employers were able, Jacoby writes, "to construct a growth coalition around the idea that business was a goose whose golden eggs would be laid only if the goose was left to labor undisturbed." Thus managerial individualism led to the creation of a popular culture, mass politics, and legal system that undermined unionism in favor of unrestrained property rights.

Employers turned their individualism loose on each other in the decades after the Civil War, until the great trusts were formed to control competition. These new big businesses had unusually abundant resources to fight unions. Only a few business leaders, notably in the National Civic Federation, were willing to incorporate labor into the new economic order—as a junior partner.

While even the early American Federation of Labor (AFL), along with more militant late-nineteenth-century labor movements, envisioned a new cooperative commonwealth, the AFL eventually pursued a more fragmented, decentralized, job-oriented unionism. Despite the later rise of industrial unionism and forms of industry-wide bargaining, the fragmented model continued to dominate American unionism. This was partly because individualistic employers were willing to band together, especially after the turn of the century, to combat unions but rarely to negotiate with them on an industry-wide basis.

One consequence of this fragmented pattern of organizing and bargaining is that American unions came to concentrate mainly on control of jobs and work rules. This directly pitted unions against employers obsessed with control. Many European labor movements, by contrast, evolved a pattern of high-level negotiation with employer federations that permitted both more managerial flexibility in local plants and universal protection for workers. Decentralized bargaining in the United States exposed an employer who was unionized to a competitive disadvantage with

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an unorganized competitor, giving added incentive to resist unions.

During World War I labor gained government support and consequently made gains because of its support for the war effort, but the brief accord was shattered by a multifaceted attack on unions. In the 1920s the courts enacted labor law by injunction, breaking strikes and unions. Enlightened management employed "welfare capitalism," discouraging unionism with tactics ranging from creating "a corporate family" to sharing profits.

Finally, with the New Deal of the 1930s, workers won the right to organize and act collectively. Yet even in victory the seeds of future reversals were sown. The primary motivation of the Wagner Act was to establish industrial peace (secondarily to prevent the downward spiral in wages that worsened depressions). While some corporations fought back with force, others, such as Sears Roebuck, followed the advice of Nathan Shefferman, the progenitor of the contemporary school of antilabor consultants, who insisted that bad supervisors invite unionism. Therefore top executives must weed out management troublemakers.

Almost from the beginning the courts began asserting the primacy of vague common-law rights of private property over the new collective rights of workers. These judicial assumptions, legal scholar James Atleson has argued, include the overriding importance of continued production, the need to control workers to prevent irresponsible action, and deference of workers to management's rights to run the workplace.

Here is one example of such judicial subversion of labor's new rights: Shortly after the Supreme Court upheld the Wagner Act, it casually observed in the case of *Mackay Radio & Telegraph Co.* that employers could hire people to permanently replace strikers in order to maintain production. Given little attention at the time, that decision came back to haunt labor in the 1980s. Under the banner of the assumed but unlegislated rights of private property, it took away the right that Congress had just enacted in law—the right of workers to act collectively without being fired.

Again during World War II the government supported unions in exchange for cooperation in the war effort. Union membership soared from nine to fifteen million. The lesson seemed clear: if the government had a coherent national goal (fighting a war, ending a depression), and if labor disruption posed a credible threat, unions could gain protection. But the price exacted under the War Labor Board, which set the precedent for postwar labor relations, was a system of workplace grievance settlement that reduced the direct role of workers and of collective action.

The War Labor Board encouraged unions to divert wage demands into a new area of benefits. The medical and business establishment's campaign against "socialized medicine" stymied efforts to expand the New Deal's welfare state to provide health care for all. Compared to other industrial countries, our provision of social welfare was miserly. Unions were forced to win what elsewhere was universally assured through collective bargaining, thus contributing to the much higher incidence of strikes in the United States. The piecemeal provision of health care left many people out, creating a gulf between the unionized and the unorganized. In the 1980s, nearly four-fifths of all strikes, by some estimates, were conducted to defend health insurance.

Management Rebounds After the War

After the war, management struck back. Concerned that it had given up too much control over the workplace during the war and wary about both prospects for the postwar economy and labor radicalism, corporate management tried to reassert control not just in the workplace but in politics. "They were engaged in a complex struggle for moral authority, not just a contest for power," observes historian Howell John Harris in *The Right to Manage*. Anticommunist hysteria and the postwar economic boom undergirded this battle to reassert corporate capital as the goose that could lay its golden eggs only if granted the untrammeled right to manage.

Many corporations were willing to accommodate bargaining with unions, but none admitted any alternative to the hierarchical, authoritarian organization of business. One

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early and crucial battle involved blocking the right of foremen and supervisors to organize into their own unions. The most important managerial victory was passage in 1947 of the Taft-Hartley Act. That act gave managers the right to persuade their employees not to join unions and took from unions many essential weapons, including the secondary boycott, a powerful tool for building labor solidarity.

With certain exceptions such as organization of public employees, the labor movement's expansion was stalled. At its peak, collective bargaining may have affected about half the work force, but in most European countries 80 to 90 percent of workers were covered, even if smaller percentages actually belonged to unions.

The limited accommodation of some companies in the early postwar years was at most tactical. Even corporations like General Motors and General Electric, which seemed willing to live with unions, sought to locate new factories in the Sunbelt—or overseas—to avoid unions. Many businesses, especially new high-tech firms (IBM is the prototype) and those with few unionized worksites, developed a sophisticated nonunion strategy. As Thomas Kochan, Harry Katz, and Robert McKersie concluded in *The Transformation of American Industrial Relations*, the new, more flexible organization of work effectively immunized factories against unionization.

In the sixties and, especially, the seventies, employers took advantage of their new rights to campaign among workers against unions. Under the "industrial pluralism" model, employers were viewed as a corporate "person" exercising free speech. Yet management's role in the union representation election—a complicated feature unique to U.S. labor law—fundamentally undermined the law's unconditioned right of workers to decide if they wanted a union.

By law management couldn't threaten to shut down the plant if they voted for a union, but the new wave of anti-union consultants showed how to make that threat without violating the letter of the law. Employers could legally post leaflets with two pictures of an anonymous factory: one labeled "before the union" might have a full parking lot, another labeled "after" might have an empty lot. After which could come the question: Which do you want?

Consultants, advising management in about 85 percent of all representation elections in the early eighties, developed a standard litany that the frontline supervisors delivered as they talked to workers: unions just want your dues, always are out on strike, and provoke violence. Finally, managers would plead, we know we've made mistakes, give us another chance. Such faked contriteness could work wonders. Often, however, companies decided that breaking the law to defeat a union was worth the small price. There are no legal penalties, simply remediation, such as reinstatement of a fired union supporter with partial back pay. But that would come long after the union was defeated.

Academics have debated the fine points heatedly, but the conclusion seems clear: even management opposition that is legal works effectively to reduce the likelihood of unions' winning representation elections. Illegal tactics, especially firing pro-union workers, work better but may not be needed. One study concluded that unions were likely to win around three-fifths of elections when there is no or light opposition, less than a third against an intense campaign, and less than one-tenth when management breaks the law.

The evidence is that violations are widespread. In union representation elections in 1980, Professor Paul Weiler estimated, roughly one in every twenty pro-union workers was fired illegally; by 1985 one in ten pro-union workers was illegally discharged. The number of unfair labor practices charged to employers in elections—and the proportion upheld by the National Labor Relations Board—soared from the late fifties to the eighties, and the average number of employer unfair labor practices per election continued to rise in the eighties. The NLRB, which took a markedly antilabor turn under Reagan, could not keep pace, and delays in processing charges grew, lengthening in the eighties to an average of two years.

From 70 to 80 percent of representation elections in the forties and fifties, union victory

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rates steadily dropped until the late seventies, when they bottomed out at about a 47 percent success rate that has remained fairly stable. Richard Freeman and James Medoff of Harvard (seconded by Michael Goldfield of Cornell) estimate that from one-fourth to one-half the decline in union victories stems from increased management resistance.

In 1978, with a Democratic president and Congress, labor leaders tried to pass a mild reform of labor laws that would have tempered some of the most egregious management opposition to organizing. To their shock, most of the blue-chip unionized corporations from the Business Roundtable and the Labor-Management Group—supposedly favoring "industrial pluralism"—joined with anti-union managers to oppose the reform. Despite their numbers, Senate Democrats and President Jimmy Carter were unable to stop a Republican filibuster. The bill failed and with it the illusion of a labor-management accord.

Perhaps, union critics argue, labor's problem is not that employers fight back but that workers simply don't want unions. Surveys consistently show that from 60 to 75 percent of nonunion workers say they would be unlikely to vote for a union. On the flip side, however, if the 25 to 40 percent who would vote for a union now had one, unions would have a record membership. Contrary to popular imagery, one of the least fertile places for a union to try to organize now would be a large factory in the Northeast with a mainly white male work force. One of the most promising organizing prospects would be a small service establishment in the South or Southwest with mainly women or African-American workers.

High Cost to Union Success

The recent experience of six hundred predominately black women workers at two textile fabricating factories of S. Lichtenberg & Co. in east Georgia is unusual only in the tenacity and success of the workers. After a strong organizing effort that started with a secret blitz of workers and continued with a community-oriented campaign, the workers voted for union representation in 1988 by a strong margin. But management refused to bargain, fired or permanently laid off nearly two hundred pro-union workers, and violated a wide range of federal employment and safety laws. The Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers (ACTWU) mobilized political support and conducted a wide-ranging pressure campaign to force the company finally to sign a contract three years later. Even when unions win, it is often at great cost.

In another case a union organized a worksite of a Colorado high-tech company, American Laser. The owner promptly shut down the plant and moved to Idaho. When the union pursued him, he threatened to shut down the Idaho plant. The union won again, and he moved again, this time hiring only Laotian workers. It was such an uneconomic, ideologically inspired strategy that the company's major shareholder charged the chief executive with failing his fiduciary responsibility to stockholders.

In the eighties, management opposition to organizing increased, but the biggest change was the dramatic decline in the number of union representation elections held—from around seven thousand to eight thousand per year in the seventies to around three thousand to four thousand in the eighties. Even before this dramatic drop-off, estimates are that a third of the decline in union organizing success resulted from decreased union organizing activity. Although a few unions, such as the Service Employees, AFSCME (public workers), Food and Commercial Workers, and ACTWU, have vigorous organizing efforts and increasingly avoid the cumbersome NLRB election process, most unions have surrendered the field.

The bureaucratic, conservative character of most unions that makes them unwilling or unable to act now that their very existence is threatened is not simply a result of their internal evolution. It is also a consequence of management's successful campaign to curtail, then finally crush, the rights of workers.

Still, despite the great difficulties in organizing, there is no real excuse for organized labor's pathetic record. Many unions massively lost members in the eighties, but overall union dues income rose in real terms. Organized labor has at its disposal roughly thirty-five thousand staff workers and $4 billion a

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year. Unions simply use their money badly. John Sheridan, a veteran union buster, told of one recent close representation election that a union with impressive assets in the bank lost in part because it was unwilling to spend the money for an airplane ticket for the organizer to revisit the worksite and rally the troops before balloting.

Internal union political power, however, comes from servicing existing members and winning their support, not from organizing new members. Organizers are neglected. Out of some 7,000 union staff in California, one unpublished report concluded, only 112 were organizers. At the national level, unions commit only from about 3 percent to at most 8 percent of their budgets for organizing, one insider estimates.

Ironically, as a result of labor's diminished efforts, the business of antilabor consultants has dropped off sharply in the eighties. But as economic pressures mount, employers may increasingly jettison some of the "positive labor relations" that served to keep unions out. Many high-tech firms, such as Apple and IBM, which had generated employee loyalty with promises of job security, have cut back their work forces. Workers who find that management's promise of participation is not delivered may begin to look positively at unions.

During the seventies, the U.S. economy underwent repeated shocks, including the OPEC oil price hikes and a wave of foreign competition. In both cases, the individualistic culture of American business undergirded corporate opposition to the idea of either an energy policy or an industrial policy. In either case, a coordinated public policy might have cushioned the blows by reducing energy costs through aggressive conservation or by refurbishing America's industrial base.

Making Workers Pay

U.S. managers were unwilling to admit that their own shortcomings—inadequate research and development, poor design, outmoded manufacturing techniques, wasteful management, and growing strategic shortsightedness—were fundamental problems of American business. True to their history, they blamed workers and unions for their woes.

Instead of a social compact for economic renewal, there was a massive effort—directly and indirectly—to shift the costs of adjustment onto workers. If the Democrats had been willing and able to create a new sense of national purpose, the downward drift of labor might have been slowed.

The anarchic attempt by corporations to shift costs rather than increase productivity met with union resistance and contractual cost-of-living adjustment clauses. The inflation of the seventies, which deeply cut into nonunion incomes, increased the divergence in real labor costs between union and nonunion operations. This gave business added financial incentive to do what they ideologically wished to do: crush the unions.

The winds of deregulation began to blow in the seventies as well, subjecting industries like trucking, telecommunications, and airlines to new competition, much as international trade was battering manufacturing industries like auto that had long been buffered from international competition. Unions had been strongest in these relatively noncompetitive—either regulated or oligopolistic—areas of the economy.

In the eighties at least three additional major economic pressures developed, all of them consequences in part of the laissez-faire ideology of American business. Starting with the end of Carter's regime, inflation was reined in by policies that produced both deep recession and a strong dollar. Both devastated the traditional core of union manufacturing strength through demands for concessions, plant closings, overseas flight of capital, and massive layoffs. Then the takeover craze, a frenzied expression of the anarchic and predatory American business ideology, was fostered by a new era of financial unregulation. Loaded with debt, forced into extreme short-term strategies, takeover companies typically slashed wages, smashed unions, and shut down or spun off unwanted businesses.

When Reagan fired the air traffic controllers, he signaled the legitimacy of extreme tactics toward unions and strikers. Unlike private employees, the controllers were not under the

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National Labor Relations Act and had no protected right to strike (although previous presidents had not fired federal strikers). But just as corporations that had no need for concessions took advantage of the climate to demand concessions from workers, so private employers were now encouraged to break strikes by hiring "permanent replacements."

Management would pose outrageous demands or provoke workers—such as Pittston's decision to drop health care for the company's retirees or the *New York Daily News*'s discipline of a sitting worker—to precipitate a strike. Then they would rush in strikebreakers, often provided by antilabor consultants and defended by a new generation of Pinkerton-style guards. The security forces—such as Wackenhut or the ominous-sounding Nuckols and Associates—frequently attempted to provoke violence in front of their video recorders in order to get injunctions.

Although reliable statistics aren't available, it appears that employers dramatically increased their use of both "permanent replacements" and lockouts (during which, thanks to a 1986 Supreme Court ruling, employers could use temporary replacements). Employers had used permanent replacements—"scabs," to unionists—in the postwar era mainly in the South and in situations where unions were weak. But in the eighties almost all unions were weak. Although strike activity fell to a record low, a General Accounting Office study concluded that businesses threatened to use "permanent replacements" in one-third of all strikes and actually used them in one-sixth of all strikes. University of Wisconsin professor of industrial relations Craig Olson estimates that employers have reverted to the methods of the era before the National Labor Relations Act. Businesses used scabs more frequently in the 1980s than they had in the 1920s and at about the same rate as in the early decades of the century, although much less than in the 1880s. After World War II many businesses did not even attempt to operate during strikes. Then, as automation increased, businesses tried to operate with skeletal crews of management, and one anti-union academic concluded from a study of businesses during strikes that replacement workers were not even essential.

International Paper's (IP) mill in Jay, Maine, had been organized since the early part of the century. The Paperworkers Union and management bargained hard, but the union was accepted. Then in the early eighties the company lost overseas markets because of the strong dollar. A new anti-union chief executive took over, determined to cut labor costs and "increase flexibility." The Paperworkers agreed to concessions in exchange for an understanding that the company would not cut wages or attack the union itself. The company also took on heavy debt to buy one of its competitors.

By 1987 the company was again very profitable, but still proposed to the union a drastic reorganization of work to boost productivity. Workers were willing to cooperate, despite anticipated loss of jobs and income, if they had a voice in administering the new plan. But management adamantly insisted on its proposals. When a plant in Mobile, Alabama resisted the work-rule changes, the company locked out the workers and operated with temporary replacements provided by B.E. & K., a Southern construction firm that specializes in strikebreaking.

B.E. & K. was also a looming presence at Jay during those negotiations, conveying the threat of strikebreakers. Workers reluctantly decided to strike because they did not want to abandon their fellow workers in Mobile. Shortly after they struck, IP began hiring replacements, mainly brought in from out of state. Violence erupted, with both strikers and scabs implicated. With the conventional strike failing, the union brought in labor consultant Ray Rogers to conduct a "corporate campaign" against IP. The company offered to negotiate if the wide-ranging attack were called off, but when the union did so, the company refused to bargain on bringing back the strikers. Two years after walking out, the strikers called off their battle and offered to return to work. The union was decertified at two other IP mills where strikebreakers were used, but not yet at Jay because of charges pending before the NLRB.

Not every management makes the same strategic choice. Scott Paper explicitly rejected IP's approach, choosing to build labor-management cooperation. Another major Maine employer,

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Bath Iron Works, had used strikebreakers to impose a two-tier contract a few years earlier. Later the company's chairman testified on behalf of an anti-strikebreaker bill, arguing that using strikebreakers permanently poisoned labor relations, harming the company's long-term viability. Yet as one union organizer reports, in every representation drive in New England since 1987, employers have raised the specter of Jay to dissuade workers from joining the union.

Julius Getman, a University of Texas law professor who studied the Jay strike, said there had been a real possibility of cooperation at the Jay mill before the strike, but "the possibility of a more complete victory . . . made the company unwilling to take the necessary steps."

What kind of victory do American managers win by destroying unions? Increasingly they pay a heavy price even in apparent victory: Eastern destroyed itself as well as its union while defaulting on several hundred million dollars owed to creditors. The Tribune Company lost $400 million in its crusade to break *New York Daily News* unions, according to one analysis, $100 million more than the cost of a new printing plant that might have made the paper profitable and the jobs secure.

The evisceration of organized labor has removed a check against the tendencies to inequality and depression of wages in recessions. Thus one of the New Deal macroeconomic goals of the Wagner Act has been undercut. The current recession will be worse and the recovery weaker as a result of the continued depression of consumer buying power.

Despite all the talk of cooperation, American management styles foster extremely high levels of distrust. Whether certain forms of cooperation are desirable is an open question, but paradoxically quality circles and similar cooperative devices are more common in unionized workplaces than in nonunion. Economists Bennett Harrison and Maryellen Kelley of Carnegie Mellon University report that in the metalworking industry "non-union workplaces with joint labor-management problem-solving committees are significantly *less* efficient and *less* likely to provide job security than is a traditional union-based system." Freeman and Medoff also reported that unionized firms are more productive, partly because workers quit less frequently, even though unions do reduce corporate profits.

American business culture defines workers and, by extension, unions as the enemy with an ideological passion that surpasses cold economic calculation. The National Commission on Skills of the American Work Force found only one in twenty companies planned to compete in the global market by improving quality and productivity. Most companies simply wanted to lower labor costs by lowering wages. Workers, especially unionized workers, often have a longer term stake in a company's well-being than managers or even stockholders. If they had a stronger strategic voice, they might temper the ruinous short-term outlook of many U.S. corporations.

In the 1990s, the question is whether unions have it in them to persuade the American public that they have such a positive role to play. It will not be an easy battle to win. Unions would have to counter the current management ethos, which deifies the market, with an alternative vision of social responsibility. The good news is that attacks on workers and unions may have begun to backfire. During the past decade public approval of unions rose slightly, while public opinion of business, despite all the Reagan propaganda, slumped. But there is still a long way to go. □

Coming in the Spring Issue

A Victory for Democracy in the Teamsters' Union

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Jo-Ann Mort

HOW THE MEDIA "COVER" LABOR

The Story That's Not Being Told

It is easy to forget that there are still places like Hamlet, North Carolina . . . until something tragic happens to put them on our mind." So the *Washington Post* informed its readers several days after a September 1991 fire in a chicken-processing plant in Hamlet killed twenty-five workers.

It *is* easy to forget . . . especially when no reporters are there to remind you. Consider the facts from Hamlet. The food-processing plant doors were locked to prevent workers from stealing chickens. (These workers were so poor that they had to be buried in donated clothing.) In its eleven years, the factory had never been investigated by the North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). North Carolina, with more manufacturing jobs than any state in the nation, is less than 4.5 percent unionized.

It is this economy that the *New York Times* praised in an article about the Southeast on September 10 for "many of the region's historic business advantages—low labor and living costs, a pro-business, anti-union environment and a good quality of life. . . ." This article was published just seven days after the fire in Hamlet.

Reporting news is, after all, a business. The recession has hit the media hard and things will only get worse. There is pressure for ad revenue and scarce resources for staff. These two factors don't bode well for the labor press beat. When editors look for a beat to cut, labor is the one. The *Los Angeles Times,* which just cut its full-time labor beat, also recently implemented a hiring freeze. Competition for scarce advertising revenue has newspapers framing their coverage for an elite buying public.

The United States doesn't have state-supported media like the British Broadcasting Corporation or the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which embody the idea that the media provide a public service.

In the United States, National Public Radio (NPR) is struggling to attain that same status. Yet even NPR, considered a hotbed of radicalism by many of our elites, could do more to cover labor. Union-related issues do make it onto the NPR airwaves, but an economic issues the spin on the story often comes from a management point of view. NPR now has a half-hour show called "Marketplace," a sort of a business page of the air produced with corporate backing and regularly featuring economic commentators from the Conference Board.

Harry Bernstein, veteran *Los Angeles Times* labor reporter, remembers an earlier time when "reporters like Abe Raskin of the *New York Times* began to objectively report the activities of organized labor, which by then had become a major political and economic force in America. . . . Most other major newspapers followed suit and for several years, unions were a legitimate topic for reporting, although seldom mentioned in the electronic media. Within the past five years or so, there's been another shift: organized labor is being ignored on the invalid ground that it is no longer important enough to devote any considerable space or reporter's time to."

Bernstein writes one of the few surviving labor columns in America. Yet, at the time this article is being written, labor coverage is in

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flux at the *Los Angeles Times*. Bernstein's column, which once appeared on the front page of the business section, has been relegated to the inside of the section. "My own column continues and what I write is not censored in any way," Bernstein reports. "But I just don't know about its future."

Reflecting on the cancellation of his daily labor beat, *Los Angeles Times* reporter Bob Baker says, "This is bigger than one paper or one beat. There's clearly some discomfort at the notion of covering something from the workers' point of view or any individual point of view. This is what's happened to big city journalism; a lot of papers that a generation ago might have been proud to cover society from the bottom up are today much more cautious. . . . The business . . . is run by people who are more comfortable with the top-down, institutional view of the world . . . more distrustful of instinct, more reliant on public opinion polls." When Baker's beat was canceled, he was told to continue covering the Teamsters union—which of course represents the worst face of labor.

Being a labor reporter won't earn you a promotion today. Writing in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* recently, former *New York Times* labor writer Bill Serrin reflected: "Your colleagues are off covering the White House or the State Department, hyping some trend and getting on Page One. You are camping out in some mountain motel or a bare room with three locks on the door above a sleazy bar writing about coal miners or laid-off steelworkers and hoping your piece isn't held or dumped inside."

After Serrin departed, the *New York Times* changed its labor beat into a national "workplace" beat—which can mean almost anything.

In January 1990, the metro section editors of the *Times* assigned an ambitious reporter, Alan Finder, to cover labor in New York City after several years of a dry spell on the metro desk—but after only ten months, the beat was canceled and Finder reassigned to cover transportation.

The partial reemergence of a metro labor beat at the *New York Times* came only after the paper found itself unable adequately to cover the *Daily News* strike. There was an acknowledgment at the time that labor was important and that the *New York Times* had to do a better job in covering New York City area labor.

Yet, even while the beat was in place, Finder was pulled off to cover stories ranging from racial controversy at City College to the governor's budget. Labor coverage at the *Times* seemed to be a luxury, not a necessity. Now, as the paper launches a larger metro section, with expanded bureaus in the outer boroughs and suburbs, the labor beat has been discontinued, even though there will be an increase of fifteen to twenty reporters in the new section.

"I agree that it's not something that's been done much or well by most papers in the last several years," says Finder, discussing his former beat. "It's a very fertile area with a lot of good, important subjects to write about. I hope the *New York Times* and other papers will begin to address it.

"In many ways the issues don't fit the conventions of daily news, other than strikes or city labor negotiations," Finder adds. "Most kinds of issues worth exploring are not simple hits. You've got to find ways to take individual worker issues and broaden them to a wider theme. Covering labor and workplace issues requires a lot of inventiveness."

One argument used by editors at the *New York Times* for not covering organized labor is the shrinking percentage of the national work force that is unionized. However, the unionized work force in New York City comes to nearly 36 percent, and plays a significant—even pivotal—role in the life of the city.

There are still some exceptions to the disappearance of the labor beat. Frank Swoboda at the *Washington Post* and Phil Dine at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* are two reporters who cover labor fairly and knowledgeably.

Swoboda, a senior reporter at the *Post*, combines coverage of legislative issues related to workers with reporting from the field. He also covers, in-depth, the AFL-CIO as an institution. Swoboda is able to leverage the seniority he has at the paper for his beat. And while other newspaper editors are arguing that the AFL-CIO has slipped in importance as an

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institution, Washington's hometown paper gives adequate coverage to the labor federation.

Phil Dine, younger than most labor reporters, agrees that his generation of reporters knows little about labor today or its historic role and might tend not to think of it as an interesting area to cover. Dine established the labor beat at a time when the *Post-Dispatch* was competing with another paper for readers.

After Dine proved to be successful by reporting his stories with a human-interest angle, his editors approached him to write a weekly column. "They were trying to personalize the paper with more columnists," Dine says. His column combines St. Louis area coverage with national and international coverage. He was recently on assignment in Eastern Europe, where he was able to focus on labor problems in that part of the world.

"There's a lot of interest in the labor movement in St. Louis," Dine states, pointing out that St. Louis has historically been an important union city. The International Brotherhood of Teamsters was founded there and almost one out of every six Teamster members in the country lives in the region covered by Dine's paper. Reflecting on his paper's publisher, he concludes that "the Pulitzer tradition has been for the underdog and the paper's always been sympathetic toward issues like civil rights and improved working conditions."

Newsday, owned by the Los Angeles Times-Mirror Company, has a solid full-time labor reporter, Ken Crowe, who also combines local and national issues, though by default Crowe mostly covers labor stories in the New York City area. The large amount of local stories precludes one reporter from reaching much beyond New York. *Newsday* does have a workplace reporter, too, who assists in covering labor issues, especially health and safety concerns.

But in the great majority of cases, if the labor movement is covered at all, it's from the business page. Although the *Los Angeles Times* has lost its full-time labor reporter, it still has a workplace reporter at the business desk. Whether unions get covered through that beat is an open question. From the business desk, labor issues tend to be seen in terms of the bottom line. A labor settlement, for example, is covered with attention paid to the market share effect it will have on the company, rather than benefits or hardships for the workers.

Interestingly, both the *Wall Street Journal* and *Business Week* buck the trend. Both have full-time labor reporters who cover social policy and workplace issues with great consideration given to the impact of policies on the work force.

Unlike the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times,* most reporters at the *Journal* and *Business Week* make it their business to cover the kinds of people who may not read their publications. Few blue-collar women read the *Wall Street Journal,* yet reporters regularly include a blue-collar perspective. For instance, in a recent piece on the lack of child care, the reporter interviewed women in managerial and top-level white collar positions as well as a woman who was a member of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers. This woman pointed out that most factory workers have two choices: they can either stay home with the child and risk being fired or they can leave a child home without supervision. Her experience was in direct contrast to that of the more relatively affluent women interviewed in the article, who had more flexible options.

When the *Journal* reports on the leveraged buy-out disasters of the 1980s, reporters consistently chronicle the devastating effects on thousands of workers who have lost their jobs and their pensions. The *Wall Street Journal* regularly opens its op-ed pages to union voices in a special "Counterpoint" feature. Contrast this with the *New York Times,* where it is extremely rare to read a labor point of view.

We can only speculate as to why the *Wall Street Journal* should feel it necessary to cover labor with some thoroughness while the *New York Times* does not: the *Times* is increasingly oriented toward upper middle-class suburbanites and upwardly (or these days, downwardly) mobile yuppies who have neither feeling for nor interest in workers and their organizations. The *Journal* speaks first and foremost to the American business and managerial classes, for whom it is essential to have accurate information about the state of labor. The *Wall Street Journal*'s news staff is independent of the

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paper's editorial staff, which allows for the *Journal*'s liberal outlook on economic and social policy. The *New York Times*, in contrast, seems to be run these days by editorial and news editors who are liberal on social policy and conservative on economic policy

Business Week has one of the best labor reporters in the country, Aaron Bernstein, whose father is the *Los Angeles Times* labor columnist. Bernstein not only reports on contract disputes and workplace trends, he also writes opinion pieces about subjects ranging from the need for labor-law reform and arguments for increasing the minimum wage. Bernstein is supplemented by a reporter based in Washington who covers social policy and workplace issues with an emphasis on organized labor. The magazine also has pro-labor Robert Kuttner writing a regular column as one of several contributing writers.

Network television on the other hand has never been good at covering labor. In a 1989 study of network news coverage of labor, Fairness and Accuracy in Media (FAIR), a media monitoring group, found that NBC Nightly News devoted a total of forty seconds to workplace safety.

The same study found that striking miners in Siberia had a better chance of receiving coverage than striking miners in Virginia. One example of this was illustrated during the United Mineworkers' strike against Pittston two years ago. When several thousand miners and their supporters occupied a company facility in Virginia, the occupation was virtually blacked out by the electronic media, even though the incident offered a visually dramatic event.

Last April, CBS reported on the effects on unions of scab workers. After the report aired, a group of right-wing congressmen fighting proposed federal antiscab legislation denounced the story as "outrageously one-sided" and lodged a complaint with CBS president Lawrence Tisch. This complaint, according to FAIR, led to a meeting between the Republican congressmen and CBS Washington, D.C. bureau chief Barbara Cohen.

FAIR quotes from a *Wall Street Journal* article that said Cohen assured the elected officials that "her bureau would produce another piece on the legislation when it reaches the House floor. . . . Ms. Cohen said CBS would work then with Republicans 'to get their recommendations as to the best spokesman for their side.' "

In fact, in the last year, CBS has been particularly good among the networks in pointing out the hardships faced by middle-class and working Americans and union members in today's economy.

It was a CBS news crew that chronicled a portion of the recent organizing campaign at Fieldcrest Cannon Mills, where the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers (ACTWU) tried to organize seven thousand textile workers in North Carolina in the summer of 1991. This was the largest National Labor Relations Board election in North Carolina in six years, when ACTWU last ran an election at the same facility. The union came within two hundred votes of winning, after losing decisively two previous times.

The mill had been sold between election number two and number three to Fieldcrest. The previous owner, California financier David Murdock, held on to the pension fund when he sold the mill. He invested the workers' retirement money in insurance annuities which then defaulted. Workers once expecting about $90 a month for their retirement were to end up with nothing.

CBS News and ABC News both covered Murdock's pension problems, using the Cannon situation as a case study for what is happening elsewhere in America. Both reports were sympathetic to the workers and the union. But the most striking part of the CBS coverage for this viewer was a camera shot from inside one of the mills. Tacked up on the wall was a notice of the union election from the NLRB. Union representatives are not allowed on the premises of a workplace during a union election, a fact probably not known or even considered by most Americans. Yet, a network television crew was allowed access. The only view union staff had of the election notice was on national television!

Shortly after the piece on the Cannon workers' pension problems, the same CBS

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news show, "CBS Sunday Morning," broadcast a segment on the state of unions. The same producer did both segments. The second segment clearly stated that the presumption of fairness in union elections may be a false presumption. The show portrayed workers being disenfranchised in a union organizing campaign and in a strike.

Unfortunately, one or two sympathetic television producers and reporters aren't enough . . . though they offer drops of water in a drought. The norm in television news coverage is that labor is an afterthought, if considered at all.

In a rare ABC "Nightline" show on workplace danger and negligent OSHA enforcement dealing with the aftermath of the Hamlet disaster—almost six weeks after the accident—ABC reporter Chris Wallace asked his panelists, "Are there other Hamlets out there?"

The answer is yes, many others, with thousands of workers at risk. The real question is, will the investigative work be done to find these disasters *before* more people are killed?

Perhaps "Nightline" and its viewers would be more aware of the dangerous circumstances in today's workplaces if network news shows didn't wait for a disaster in order to investigate workers' conditions. On the eve of the Solidarity Day March on Labor Day 1991, "Nightline" had scheduled a panel to discuss the current state of organized labor with a labor writer, a labor leader, and a business representative. The show was bumped for an interview with Jerry Falwell on homosexuality. The labor panel was arguably timely, tied as it was to a major demonstration in Washington, but the show was rescheduled for a month later and aired on the East Coast much later than normal show time, after "Monday Night Football."

There is no conspiracy in the media not to cover organized labor. Neither the print nor the electronic media are organized systematically enough for a conspiracy. There are two probable reasons organized labor is not getting covered. The first is a class bias on the part of media corporate owners and publishers. The second is the perception that organized labor "doesn't matter" anymore. The latter perception is one that labor must take more seriously.

Editors, publishers, and even some reporters argue that the organized labor movement is too weak today to warrant the kind of press attention it once received. But, even with the decline of union membership, issues remain and may even become more critical.

The media's job is to search out those who desperately need to have their story told. When will our national press corps begin to wonder whether it's really good public policy for this nation to abandon unionism? After how many Hamlets? □

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Nick Salvatore

THE DECLINE OF LABOR

A Grim Picture, A Few Proposals

PATCO, Hormel, Greyhound, Eastern, Nordstrom, Equitable: the list goes on and on. Organized labor has suffered its worst decade since the 1920s, as intense employer opposition, encouraged and supported by conservative national administrations, left the labor movement reeling, its membership falling, its morale plummeting. Even victories, such as occurred in the Pittston coal strike, left an odd taste. The United Mine Workers and their allies won a major victory to maintain the status quo; but the hope that this success would rejuvenate labor's spirit has proved elusive.

There are some who argue that, painful as the Reagan-Bush era has been, it did not usher in a new domestic order. In a popular adaptation of cyclical theories of reform articulated by Irving Bernstein, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and Kevin Phillips, many in labor have come to see this decade of pain as a harbinger of regeneration. As the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) emerged victorious from the Coolidge-Hoover decade of anti-unionism, so too would labor lay the foundation of renewed growth and vitality.

Perhaps, but I fear not. It is foolhardy to predict the future, as the pundits who predicted labor's continued decline in the spring of 1933 discovered. There exists an enormous capacity for human initiative even in the worst of times. A historically informed analysis of the situation confronting labor, however, undermines easy confidence that the 1990s will duplicate the experiences of the 1930s.

Many of the hopes for regeneration draw strength from blaming Reagan, Bush, and, to some extent, union leaders for labor's precipitous decline. The current level of union strength, at some 16 percent of the work force, is often considered the consequence of Republican policies, employer resistance, and the somewhat inept response of labor's leadership. The failure to follow the 1981 Labor Day demonstration in Washington with continued activity in cities throughout the country is noted as one example of how the leadership failed. The ugly open fight within labor's family that enveloped all sides in the Hormel strike is another example. There is an assumption that if leaders would only listen to their rank and file, grounding themselves again in the militancy of the American working class, a revitalized labor movement would, in time, vanquish employers and Republicans alike. This, in turn, supports the belief that, following the darkened 1980s, the 1990s will emerge in a CIO-like flourish. For if labor's decline is of recent vintage, as many believe, the turnaround, however complicated, is also close at hand. The history of the past forty years, alas, suggests the opposite.

In its 1960 report the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) noted that the figure for union density (the percentage of workers organized in the nonagricultural work force) had dropped 2 percent from its historic 1953 high of 34.1 percent. Although during the 1950s the reunited labor movement was widely recognized as an important force in the nation's political and economic life, the BLS did not see this trend as an aberration. Instead, it noted that "in recent years" these figures had consistently "moved slowly downward." A decade later, following a period of unparalleled economic expansion, the BLS reported an even lower figure, with only 27.4 percent of the work force organized.

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The expansion of unionization among government employees, following John F. Kennedy's 1962 executive order allowing them to join unions, temporarily masked a disturbing BLS finding: between 1968 and 1970, union membership in manufacturing had declined by more than 45,000. This was a small figure, to be sure, when the United Auto Workers (UAW) and the United Steelworkers (USW) had a combined membership of over 2.6 million, but ominous, nonetheless, in a decade of economic growth. By 1980, when Courtney D. Gifford edited the BLS volume, the percentage of union workers had dropped to 24.7. The decline of unionization in industrial production continued during the 1970s. In the last two years of that decade, Courtney estimated, the UAW and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers (ACTWU) each lost over 9 percent of their members, the steel workers' union lost 3.7 percent, and the United Rubber Workers 15.2 percent. Even when the economy recovered from the recession in 1979–1982, these unions failed to revive.

The social context of this four-decade decline challenges a central assumption of the cyclical theory. More than a third of the decline occurred during the 1950s and 1960s, decades of broad economic growth and, for the 1960s, of liberal Democratic ascendancy. Labor lost another 15 percent during the stagflation of the 1970s, despite the Democratic return to power in the wake of a discredited Republican administration. By the 1980s, when a structurally weakened labor movement faced Ronald Reagan, plant closings and demands for concessions accelerated the decline. Organized labor's absolute and proportional decline over decades in which the labor force itself grew dramatically suggests that the hoped-for resurgence does not lie in awaiting a liberal-populist reprise of the 1930s or "waiting for Lefty." Reagan created obstacles, but he possessed no supernatural powers. Rather, as Daniel Bell argued in 1959 in his prescient book *The End of Ideology*, when labor had then organized about 30 percent of the work force: "But in organizing this 30 percent, they have reached a saturation mark; they have organized as much of their potential as they can."

Bell pointed to the difficulties of organizing small remaining unorganized workplaces in the industrial and service sectors and thought that economic realities would limit labor's expenditure of vast sums of money for small potential returns. He also argued that the potential increase in membership in distribution and transportation would benefit such unions as the Teamsters; but that growth would be offset "by the shrinkage in the *industrial* work force" overall. Bell also argued that labor's failure, evident even in 1959, to organize the white-collar sector would continue; profound gaps between white- and blue-collar workers would make it almost impossible to achieve an alliance. To all this he added the limits imposed on collective bargaining by the necessity of tying wages to productivity (which, as John Hoerr makes clear for steel, was not always achieved) and the changes occurring in the working class as it increasingly went from a proletariat that worked for hourly wages to a "*salariat*, with a consequent change in the psychology of the workers." If Bell is right—and I think his analysis holds up remarkably well—then a structural transformation occurred over these last decades that undermines the hope that time is on "our" side.

What then is the nature of this structural change and how does it affect the possibility of a resurgence? Perhaps the most important difference between the 1930s and the 1990s is that in the 1930s the economy sat on the edge of an enormous industrial expansion that produced goods, services, and new jobs in unprecedented numbers over the following decades. During the 1960s, however, that situation began to change. The manufacturing sector lost ground to the white-collar and service sectors, with a consequent loss of jobs in the most unionized sector of the economy.

Simultaneously, in steel, auto, rubber, textile, and other industrial sectors, American producers lost technological leadership and market share to foreign imports, primarily from Japan and Germany, but with Hong Kong, Korea, and Taiwan highly competitive as well. The key to this change lay in what the Japanese were able to achieve: high quality goods, with low production costs, and the ability, with

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highly flexible structures and work rules, to adapt quickly to changed demand. Given this evolution in production, blue jeans or steel beams produced abroad could be more than competitive on the American market. In an increasingly international market, American industrial producers often found themselves at a competitive disadvantage: either they continued to lose ground to the imports, attempted to transform their production methods in the Japanese image, or sought relief in protectionist trade policies. In any case, the loss of union jobs remained a constant.

Labor's response to this change proved inadequate, as indeed did management's as well. For too long each side squared off across the rhetorical divide of class conflict, with a weakened labor movement, not surprisingly, faring poorly. When labor did join with industry, moreover, the uneasy alliance most often assumed a defensive, nationalist posture, demanding a protective tariff high enough to prevent "dumping" of high quality, low-cost products. Bound by its own historic suspicions of state involvement in the economy, labor made few sustained efforts to develop a coherent industrial policy in either the corridors of power or in the public arena. In any case, these alliances quickly broke down. Competing business interests (and not just the Reagan administration) made protectionism a highly controversial public policy. Those firms able to compete in the revamped international market demanded free trade so as not to be excluded from lucrative foreign markets. In auto, for example, any tendency toward "Japan-bashing" quickly gave way to cooperative efforts between Japanese and American manufacturers. That American corporations used this transformation to further weaken unions in their industries and to undercut hard-won gains in wages and work conditions is true; but it is not the only truth. In order to stay competitive within capitalism's global framework, fundamental changes were required, lest more jobs be lost. In the absence of a public consensus that would provide, under government aegis, joint labor-management oversight of basic industrial policy—an absence with roots in American political culture far deeper than Ronald Reagan—"free market" concepts dominated the (de)regulation of this transformation.

The central problem that the union movement faces is not that the employers did not play fair. Critics who yell foul at management's hard-ball policy forget the intense antagonism that has usually marked American industrial relations. We have to face it: labor's central problem has to do with the fact that, whichever way it turns, it faces bleak alternatives. To continue in an adversarial mode and engage management in direct conflict promises little success. Production can be shifted, strikebreakers introduced, new technologies substituted. But it is not at all clear that accommodation with management will bring better results. In auto, for example, a decade-long experiment with labor-management cooperation has been quite successful in preserving some jobs, increasing quality, and streamlining production. Yet the domestic auto industry and the UAW remain highly vulnerable to competition, especially from Japan. As of summer 1991, American auto producers continued to lose market share to Japanese models; while the UAW remained unable to organize the Japanese "transplants" that increasingly dot the American landscape. These twin losses, coupled with a sluggish economy, produced the inevitable: in an industry with serious efforts at cooperation, General Motors announced last summer that it would close two more plants by 1993, at a cost of an additional 3,500 jobs.

Since 1988 eight GM production plants have closed, directly as a result of Japanese competition. While the UAW leaders claimed that GM was "dishonest, callous and just plain dumb," and called for restrictions on imports, the underlying reality was worse. At the nonunion transplants, wholly owned subsidiaries of Japanese corporations, production increased, quality was high, and a relatively satisfied work force has, to date, rejected union organization.

Under both Democratic and Republican administrations labor has lost ground. Unable to stem the loss of membership or to achieve labor law reform under any administration from Harry Truman to George Bush, labor has endured—barely. Organizing drives in Los Angeles during the 1960s and in Houston in the

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1980s simply petered out. By 1988, according to Courtney Gifford, less than 10 percent of the working class under age twenty-five held union cards; of those between twenty-six and thirty-four, a paltry 15 percent. Even more difficult were the alterations in basic industry. The UAW lost over three hundred thousand members between 1980 and 1988. Still more disturbing is that the losses since 1988 have cut into the core of the union's membership, affecting production workers with significant levels of seniority. Indeed, the UAW seemed to have recognized these realities in the last contract round when it bargained for income, rather than job security, in the form of extensive financial benefits for displaced workers.

In steel and rubber, the conditions are actually worse because neither union has been able to achieve the security the UAW obtained for its members. While public sector unions continued to grow during the 1980s at a good rate (Service Employees International Union increased by 17 percent between 1980 and 1987), unions in the private sector hemorrhaged. In that same period the Steelworkers lost 58 percent (over seven hundred thousand) of their members, the Machinists lost 32 percent, the Carpenters 22 percent, and the Electrical Workers 23 percent.

The transformation of work and the demands of international competition have produced structural changes in the economy. Computer technology now allows banks and major corporations to have work forces in Ireland, Barbados, and Singapore process the personal checks of New Yorkers and the medical claims of union members covered by commercial insurers and to maintain the circulation files of major publishers.

Labor's valued post-1945 "social contract" with employers now seems a product less of a permanent social change than of a particular historical moment. Hammered out during a time of American economic dominance, this "contract" has clearly become a casualty of the economic restructuring. It is to preserve and restore central aspects of that "social contract" (livable wages, affordable medical insurance, pension and vacation benefits, and so on) that leads many to turn to the political arena. They hope to achieve there what has been lost in the economic struggle. Here too, however, labor's position is far more tenuous than it once was.

For forty-four years the labor movement has been unable to repeal the most offensive aspects of the Taft-Hartley Act, passed over Truman's veto in 1947. Through both Democratic and Republican administrations, in the heyday of liberalism as in the depths of Reagan's reverie, labor has been unable to amend what its leaders have called a "slave labor bill." This failure was long understood as the consequence of an unholy, regressive alliance between southern Democrats and northern Republicans. Labor's voters, generally held to be liberal and progressive (even if historically some 30 percent voted Republican), formed the backbone of the Democratic party. But by the Reagan years that distinction no longer held true. In the 1984 national election, which saw the reelection of Ronald Reagan in the wake of the PATCO strike and other overt anti-union policies, slightly more than 40 percent of trade unionists voted for the Reagan-Bush ticket. How, after four years of Reagan, could some 40 percent of organized workers and their families vote for one of the most openly anti-union presidents in recent memory? What does such a vote indicate about labor's internal composition? Answers to such questions do not encourage optimism.

Those who would look to the 1930s, explicitly or not, as a model for reform-in-the-making, would do well to consider some important components of that decade. Liberalism as a political movement was ascendant, spurred by the horrendous unemployment and the inactivity of the Hoover administration. Liberalism had a clearly identifiable premise: government had an important role to play in social and economic life. Tactically, New Deal liberalism, while containing within it many tensions and contradictions, possessed a central vision. As Thomas and Mary Edsall have written: "The original strength of Democratic liberalism was its capacity to build majorities out of minorities." It was within this framework that the CIO flourished. Itself a coalition of tendencies, the CIO, in tandem with the Democratic party, provided the organizational

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focus for these newly mobilized workers who were shedding many of the ethnic differences that had, in the 1920s, hampered unionization.

But today liberalism as a political movement is adrift, discredited in the popular culture and lacking within itself a defining premise. Gone is the operating premise about the role of government in American life; absent is widespread support for a variety of social programs; diminished, too, is the belief that organized working people represent a progressive force in the society. Democratic congressional representative Jim Slattery of Kansas, who authored legislation in April 1991 that ended the rail strike over the opposition of the unions, expressed some of these new attitudes in explaining his bill:

> I consider myself to be a representative of the blue-collar workers of America. But there are two basic factors to keep in mind. One is that the number of workers who are members of labor unions has dramatically declined. In many congressional districts there are more small businessmen and women than there are members of labor unions. Second, in the last ten years, with the emergence of political action committees, the Democratic party is less dependent on the contributions of organized labor than it was fifteen years ago.

The fact that liberalism has always been a practical political philosophy underscores the very crisis labor confronts today. Political rhetoric is no substitute for the necessary ward and precinct captains committed to a specific social program. There are many Jim Slatterys who now respond in ways dramatically different from what their predecessors did in the 1930s or 1940s. They do not fear retribution from labor or from Democratic party leaders for violating party discipline. The former has little ability to punish while the latter has no defined position on labor policy that would provide a reason for such discipline.

As labor has never been a majority force in American society, the inability of liberalism to maintain coalition politics is of profound importance. Over the last half century liberal legislators and trade unionists joined to support a governmental social program. But as communities across the nation have lost important portions of their tax base because of economic restructuring, the pressure on city and state governments to raise taxes has intensified, especially in light of federal cuts in social services. This has greatly strained labor's traditional coalition politics. Both trade unionists and unorganized working people, especially in the private sector, have been quite vocal in their communities (New Jersey, for example) in resisting new taxes or transfers of what they perceive as their diminishing resources to poorer residents. Simultaneously, some public-sector workers in New Jersey were so infuriated with Democratic cuts in social spending that they threatened to run independent, union slates in the legislative elections. "This is the end of the relationship between the Democrats and the labor movement," Robert Purcell, regional director for the Communications Workers of America, announced. But lest one think that this signaled the long-awaited return of "Lefty," a reporter asked Purcell whether labor had many friends among the Republicans. "I'm not sure we ever had a lot of friends among the Republicans," was the reply. "But if we are going to get hurt, we'll take a lot of people down with us." Purcell's comments reflect more than personal pique. In such an atmosphere, coalition building frequently falters or is never attempted.

Central to this divisiveness within labor, as in the larger society, has been the issue of race. It is not irrelevant that black unionists make up an ever larger percentage of public-sector workers or that the recipients of such government programs are widely, if erroneously, perceived as the black or Hispanic poor. The effect on labor's electoral efforts is troublesome. In the 1984 national election, labor's problem was not just that 40 percent of its members and their families voted Republican. When broken down by race these figures reveal that more than half of all white union family members pulled the lever for Reagan-Bush in 1984. The Democrats did as well as they did within labor largely as a result of the black vote. These statistics, essentially replicated four years later, suggest that the problems of building coalitions even *within* labor's diverse membership will be incredibly difficult.

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Since 1964 white men in general, northern and southern, workers and employers, have left the Democratic fold in large numbers. Although nationally the Democratic party still maintains a lead by a small margin, the Republicans have edged ahead for the first time in two generations among white voters and among all voters under forty. In contrast, less than 10 percent of blacks list themselves as Republicans. Affirmative action, welfare, the problems of the underclass, urban crime—these and other issues have effectively, if viciously, been used by Republican candidates to make serious inroads into traditional liberal constituencies, and specifically within labor's ranks. It is not as if all these whites are racists, although racism does explain a good portion of this reaction. Rather, as Jim Sleeper has argued in *The Closest of Strangers*, white workers themselves are hard-pressed economically, threatened by crime and neighborhood decay, and have received little understanding from liberals. Long before liberalism imploded upon itself, many of these workers already thought it was a bankrupt political force. As for organized labor, it has had neither the energy nor the vision to address these issues within its ranks.

Thus, at a time when the need is greatest, the ability to build liberal coalitions is weakest. Ethnic and racial divisions abound and, in some quarters, even to hint at the potential for uncovering common ground is cause for scorn and rejection. A depressing moment, to be sure. Is there anything, then, that might be done?

One foundation for the reversal of this situation may rest, paradoxically, in the recognition that no quick or immediate solution exists. Offering credit cards, for example, in an effort to gain the confidence of nonunion workers is at best a timid response that diverts attention from the depth of the problem; at its worst, it confuses the role of the union with that of the consumer culture. The nature of production may be changing, but unions must focus their energy on workers' relationship to production nonetheless.

It might be useful for labor to take this moment of structural change and organizational weakness to reassess its vision of a possible American future. The experience of the municipal unions in 1991 in New York City's ongoing fiscal crisis may be instructive here. The public emphasis on the old, hoary slogan, "Tax the rich," actually worked to undermine the possibility of using that very crisis to (re-)build a broader coalition of working people. While the slogan contained a certain elementary truth (tax laws are not equitable), it appeared to deny the economic restructuring that has transformed the tax base in cities and states. Its claim of justice for one segment of the work force, moreover, rang hollow for the overwhelming majority of workers who fell outside such union contracts. Higher raises for teachers may seem easy to justify; but if they come at the expense of classroom size and the quality of instruction for the overwhelmingly nonunion working-class children of New York's public school system, these increases pose a long-term problem for the teachers' union, for the labor movement, and, not least, for the children themselves.

Unions traditionally fight for their members, but in this context the flourish of combat was counterproductive. Given that raises and improved conditions for pupils in the schools could not both be achieved in the same fiscal year, the teachers' demands appeared to many, working people as well as middle class, as narrow, selfish demands from relatively well-paid city workers. These raises in turn established the plateau sought by other city workers, with the painful result that whatever shreds of broader political vision labor could claim lay tattered in the streets.

But there is another option, one that would both recognize the seriousness of the crisis and begin the revival of labor's self-esteem. Had the unions used that moment to raise in public discussion and at union meetings the interdependency of *all* working people, a different political vision might have emerged. If, for example, teachers and hospital workers, social workers and janitors, jointly discussed both their needs and the effects of such demands on others, including the recipients of their services and working- and middle-class taxpayers, two possible results might have emerged. Labor could have taken a giant step toward being perceived, for the first time in a generation, as a positive force in the lives of unorganized working people; and out of those ideas an

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alternative public policy position might have emerged. However understandable may be the urge to protect one's members, labor in New York nonetheless lost the opportunity to claim a more important goal in speaking for a common good and a common vision. "Share the pain" might have been the slogan; a sharp, informed analysis of the inequities in determining winners and losers in this quite real fiscal crisis across all segments of the city's people might have been the trenchant, underlying message. Even if it lost in the immediate moment, the fact that organized labor transcended its tendency to equate the needs of its ever-diminishing membership with those of all working people would have provided a foundation for further education and activity.

To call for a broad public debate within the house of labor, a debate premised on the recognition of that interdependency, is not to suggest that labor cede its efforts at organizing. Rather, it is to argue that those efforts will not, on balance, be successful without an effort to reposition labor at the core of working people's lives. A recent study by Hank Farber of Princeton University suggests why. Farber found that, among nonunion workers, job satisfaction increased and/or these workers remained unconvinced that unions could offer solutions to what dissatisfactions they had. To attempt to regain that position of importance labor needs to encourage the development of an inclusive social vision within its own ranks that may then serve as a basis for appealing to nonunion workers. Such a vision would, to be effective, publicly recognize the scope of the economic transformation already accomplished. This is essential for labor's own self-education, for the last thing labor needs at present is (understandable) anger and misinformation. Such an effort would have the additional benefit of directly involving a larger portion of labor's own members in developing specific policy responses. National leaders and staff experts play an important role, but without a broader involvement the contradictory attitudes within labor will find few avenues for resolution. The tensions that exist between public- and private-sector workers need discussion, as do the effects of the public sector's political decisions on the private sector's economy. These issues of industrial policy are simply too critical for labor not to develop regional and national voices projecting an informed social analysis. Such efforts will not secure labor from further immediate erosion but they may provide ideas necessary for a rebuilding in the future. Finally, this public recognition of that interdependency may provide a way to address more frankly the divisive issue of race within labor's ranks.

To achieve such a vision it is not necessary to transform the labor movement into something it traditionally has not been. It is a profound irony of present circumstances that a labor movement that has been for so long pragmatic and narrow in enunciating its interests must now expand its vision if only to protect that narrower set of interests. Nor is it necessary for labor to transform itself organizationally to initiate this debate. Although national leaders can and should encourage such discussion, it is at the local level where the critical change must occur. In existing shop-steward councils, in the infrequently used one-to-one programs between stewards and the rank and file, and in labor and labor-community coalitions already in place the structures exist to generate a discussion of possible responses. That labor by itself cannot dictate public policy should not paralyze these efforts; nor should the seeming invincibility of that Republican ascendancy bring only gloom. If only by default, labor may be one of the few national institutions able to serve as the incubator of a new liberal coalition. At a minimum such an attempt will provide labor with an understanding of the present depressed circumstances that will guard against greater demoralization. As Vaclav Havel wrote: "No political defeat justifies complete historical skepticism as long as the victims manage to bear their defeats with dignity." Poised as we are at a moment when the strength of the contemporary labor movement is fast approaching its pre-1918 level, the specter of widespread skepticism is the most frightening possibility. □

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Peter Dreier and John Atlas

THE SCANDAL OF MANSION SUBSIDIES

Most Americans think that federal housing assistance is a poor people's program. In fact, fewer than one-fifth of all low-income Americans receive federal housing subsidies. In contrast, more than three-quarters of wealthy Americans—some with two expensive homes—get housing aid from Washington.

The federal tax code allows homeowners to deduct all property tax and mortgage interest from their income taxes. This homeowner deduction will cost the federal government over $47 billion in 1991, according to a new Joint Taxation Committee (JTC) analysis of "tax expenditures." This amount is more than *five* times President Bush's HUD (Housing and Urban Development) budget for low-income housing. Eliminating this tax break for the wealthy—while still preserving it for the middle class—could provide substantial money to finance housing assistance for low-income families.

In a perversion of progressive tax policy, the homeowner deduction gives the largest subsidy to those with the highest incomes and the most expensive homes. About one-third of this year's $47 billion homeowner subsidy goes to the 3.8 percent of taxpayers with incomes over $100,000. About 12 percent of this subsidy goes to the wealthiest 1 percent of taxpayers with incomes over $200,000. Over half of these tax breaks (51.6 percent) go to the 8 percent of taxpayers with annual incomes over $75,000. Over 81 percent go to the 20 percent of taxpayers who earn over $50,000.

Half of all homeowners do not claim deductions at all. Tenants, of course, don't qualify. As a result, more than 80 percent of households with incomes above $200,000 receive a homeowner tax break, while less than 1 percent of households below $10,000 get this subsidy. Only 23.4 percent of the 28.8 million households with incomes between $30,000 and $50,000 receive any homeowner subsidy.

At the same time, less than one-fifth of the nation's low-income households—those who live in a subsidized apartment building, receive a rent voucher, or get a homeowner tax break—receive any federal housing assistance. This represents the lowest subsidy level of any industrial nation.

The *Washington Post* reported that John D. (Jay) Rockefeller of West Virginia receives a tax subsidy worth about $223,000 a year on his $15.3 million Washington mansion. This amount would provide rent subsidies for about fifty poor tenants.

"I have no objections when the deduction goes for houses," says Representative Sam Gibbons of Florida. "When it goes for castles, I do."

The Bush administration has continued the Reagan policy of dismantling federal housing programs for the poor. Since 1980, housing assistance has been slashed by 73 percent (from $33 billion to $9 billion, the largest cut of any domestic program), while the homeowner deduction more than doubled (from $22 billion to $47 billion). The JTC projects that this subsidy will reach $65.2 billion by 1995.

Reforming the homeowner tax break will require Congress to overcome powerful political obstacles, especially the real estate lobby. The political action committees of the National Association of Realtors (the nation's largest contributor), the National Association of Homebuilders, and the Mortgage Bankers Association have a vast local network and deep pockets. In addition, the housing industry has recently helped create a front group, called the United Homeowners Association, to lobby to protect the homeowner deduction.

The housing industry argues that the homeowner tax break is the linchpin of the American Dream. Without it, they claim, many Americans could not afford to purchase a home. Few members of Congress want to offend these generous campaign contributors or be labeled as anti-homeownership. Over half the members of the House of Representatives (including many liberal Democrats) have endorsed a nonbinding resolution, sponsored by Representative Marge Roukema (R–N.J.) on behalf of the housing industry, pledging their support for the existing homeowner tax break. Soon after taking office, President Bush, speaking at the Realtors convention, vowed to defend the existing homeowner subsidy.

How important is the homeowner deduction in promoting homeownership? Neither Canada nor

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Australia has a homeowner deduction, and their homeownership rate is about the same as that of the United States. About two-thirds of all households own their own homes.

If anything, the deduction has helped push up housing prices artificially, because homebuyers include the value of the tax subsidy in their purchase decision. It provides upper income homebuyers with a tax shelter, encouraging them to buy bigger, and more, homes than they need. And it certainly fueled the past decade's wave of housing speculation and the conversion of affordable apartments into expensive condominiums, promoting the gentrification of many urban neighborhoods.

What to do? The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has recommended two options that preserve the benefits for the broad middle class, close tax loopholes for the wealthy, and generate significant tax savings.

- Eliminate deductions for second homes. This proposal would add only about $300 million annually in new federal tax revenues. It would run into a political buzzsaw, particularly from representatives from vacation-industry strongholds like Florida, Maine, and Colorado, where builders, bankers, and realtors thrive on second homes. But it seems fair when so many Americans can't even afford a first home.

- Limit mortgage interest deductions to $12,000 per single return or $20,000 per joint return, adjusted for inflation. These ceilings are higher than the deductions now taken by nearly all homeowners; it would affect less than 2 percent of all taxpayers. According to a CBO study, it "would retain the basic incentive for homeownership, but would not subsidize the luxury component of the most expensive homes and vacation homes." The CBO estimated it would generate an additional $1.7 billion in 1993.

We suggest scrapping the homeowner deduction completely and trying an entirely new approach—a homeowner tax credit. The CBO reforms eliminate the subsidies for the wealthy and yield substantial tax savings (thus helping reduce the deficit), but they do nothing to expand homeownership or otherwise meet the housing needs of the nonaffluent. Housing activists, of course, believe that any tax savings from reforming the homeowner subsidy should be targeted for low-income housing. But the way Congress operates—with its taxwriting and budget committees operating on separate paths—makes it difficult to make this linkage work.

A tax credit would serve the same function as the deduction of encouraging homeownership, but it would be available to all families—including those low- and moderate-income households that do not itemize their deductions and so cannot take advantage of the current tax break. Capping the credit or tying it progressively to income would limit subsidies for the wealthy.

Because demand is more elastic at the bottom and middle parts of the economy, a tax credit could make the difference between renting and owning for millions of poor and working-class families now shut out of the American Dream. It thus would be much more efficient and more fair than the current approach.

Moreover, by increasing the effective demand for homes by poor and working-class families, a homeowner tax credit system would actually help the homebuilding industry (as well as brokers and mortgage lenders), and thus create jobs, and add to local tax bases. The housing industry is now in its worst slump since World War II. Indeed, this approach would help shift the discussion of federal housing policy from its current image as a "social welfare" program to the more mainstream perspective of being a way to stimulate economic recovery.

There is a growing consensus that the nation must relieve the suffering of the homeless—and assist the millions of other poor and working-class families who cannot afford market-rate rents or home prices. Let Congress, housing experts and developers debate how best to spend the money—rent vouchers, housing fix-up, or new subsidized homes—in a cost-efficient way. But let's no longer argue whether we can afford to do so. □

Stephen L. Newman

BEING WRONG ABOUT RIGHTS

Constitutionally entrenched individual rights have long been the subject of conservative ire. This is hardly surprising. Conservative notions of "law and order" and "family values" clearly favor the state at the expense of the individual. Buy why do we recently find the doctrine of rights taking fire from the left in the pages of *Dissent* and elsewhere? Is there something wrong with rights that liberals had previously failed to notice?

As best I can make out, there is a growing number on the left who think that the answer is yes. These persons join in what the scholarly literature knows as the communitarian critique of liberalism. The essence of this critique is a full-blown assault on the liberal "atomization" of society—and corresponding

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loss of community—believed to be encouraged by the individual's claim of politically unassailable rights. On this view, to invoke a right is to cut short political debate, rejecting the hard work entailed in building a democratic consensus in favor of a unilateral (and uncompromising) judicial strategy. If the courts declare someone in possession of a right, no matter how contentious the immediate issue on which the claim of right is founded, the whole business is placed beyond the reach of politics. The community is disempowered and fragmented.

First of all, it is important to note that this is not the same argument historically deployed by the left against the right of property. The latter correctly identified property rights as a means of insulating the established unequal distribution of wealth from demands for social justice. The recent communitarian critique aims more broadly and appears in the service of democracy rather than justice. Premised on the sovereign will of the majority, it accuses *all* rights of impeding the democratic process. No doubt there is some merit to this, considering the extraordinary powers of our unelected (and characteristically conservative) judiciary. Applied to civil rights, however, this line of argument loses its radical bearing and only serves to deprive vulnerable minorities of hard-won legal protections.

The communitarian critique of rights differs in another important respect from the older critique of property. Marx understood property rights to serve the *collective* interest of the bourgeoisie. Consequently, workers have a collective interest in opposing them. This is the case even though property rights adhere to individuals. Politically, the right of property is invidious when it systematically allows one class of persons to exploit another by virtue of their differing relations to the means of production. Under capitalism, then, property rights are tied to class interest and are seen to facilitate rather than obstruct common action. The recent communitarian critique of rights focuses on the way in which rights serve *personal* rather than group or class interests. Of concern are rights claims that threaten the collective identity of a democratic community.

So, for example, among the communitarian critics we find feminists arguing against First Amendment protection for pornography and progressives who question the wisdom of extending speech rights to persons who employ racist epithets or otherwise incite racial and ethnic hatred. Pornography and hateful speech are alike, the critics maintain, in that both tend to subvert our collective commitment to equality. They are evil not so much because they do some identifiable harm to particular persons but because of their effect on the social environment in which we all live. In short, the argument goes, they must be banned on account of the ill effects they have on the character of our community.

What the critics think is wrong with rights now becomes clear: rights prevent the community from taking steps necessary to protect its essential conception of the good. It seems to me that this is the crux of the matter, and the point at which communitarians leave liberalism behind. Communitarians fault liberals for assuming—mistakenly, in their view—that the social environment in which rights are exercised is unimportant. The critique insists that liberalism ignores the problem of socialization, the formal and informal learning of social norms and practices that contributes to the formation of the individual's identity. Liberals are accused of treating rights-bearing individuals as though they were fully formed human subjects, equipped with their own tastes, preferences, and values, prior to their appearance in civil society when, in fact, the nominally autonomous subject is "socially constituted." It follows from this that even a society committed to such a liberal value as tolerance cannot afford to ignore the spread of antithetical values. There can be no obligation to tolerate the rabidly intolerant.

It may come as a surprise that not all liberals would disagree with this assessment. John Locke himself saw no reason to tolerate Catholics, "Turks," or atheists, because he thought them incapable of observing a regime of toleration. And even among so-called First Amendment absolutists, few believe that the right of free speech entails a right to say anything to anyone at any place or any time. Still, I think most liberals would be uncomfortable with the logic of the communitarian argument, and rightly so. It is fraught with danger, from the liberal standpoint. Tearing down the bulwark of rights would expose the individual to the risk of a tyranny of the majority. Who is to say that a democratic community would never feel itself threatened by religious nonconformity, social experimentation, or political dissent? And yet this is precisely what communitarians on the left would have us believe. In place of rights they offer as a protection against persecution "the shared sense of membership" bonding persons in the community and the "mutuality" born of democratic participation.

To believe this we must believe that we already live in a community broadly agreed on a conception of the good life and that rights are the serpent in the garden, tempting us to betray the communal Eden. Anyone familiar with American society and politics knows this is patently false. If a shared conception

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of the good is the defining characteristic of a community, then there is no single community in the United States. Rather, there are numerous communities differing in size and degree of commitment and distinguished by sometimes overlapping, sometimes incompatible conceptions of the good. This plurality of greater and lesser associations, and the freedom of persons to move among them—or outside of them—makes liberal civil society tremendously attractive. It also requires that we be prepared to tolerate ways of living we find repugnant. I find it inconceivable that the practice of toleration could be enforced without the doctrine of rights.

If the communitarian position is as naive as I have made it out to be, why has it attracted so much interest on the left? I think the reason why is the same reason it appeals to conservatives. Communitarianism draws on an insight often neglected by liberal theorists; that the character of our social environment matters. To the degree that our society is permeated by pornographic images, our culture becomes pornographic, and it is hardly surprising that women suffer from male violence and sexual abuse. To the degree that our common speech is riddled with racial and ethnic slurs, our culture becomes racist. Hate does breed hate. These things are not in question. Where the liberal differs from communitarian critics on the left (and on the right) is over what is to be done.

The liberal advocates a *social* remedy, the communitarian favors a *political* remedy. The liberal believes that the way to deal with pornography is to persuade others not to buy it or read it or watch it. Similarly, liberals would not prohibit hateful speech that does not incite to violence; instead, they would oppose it with education and counter-argument. The liberal approach does not implicitly ignore the claim that we are "socially constituted"; it simply insists that we are more than products of our socialization. Liberals insist on treating persons as rational agents capable of reflecting critically on their own beliefs and values. Consequently, the liberal approach demands that persons be persuaded rather than coerced into changing their allegiance to some particular understanding of the good. It should not be thought, however, that liberal persuasion need be restricted to the form of moral argument best suited to philosophy journals. Economic boycotts, public ridicule, and nonintercourse—shunning—can be legitimate techniques of persuasion (although liberals in the tradition of J.S. Mill will surely want to argue over where to draw the line).

Communitarians, on the other hand, show less concern for the autonomy of rational agents. Knowing that laws affect behaviors and believing (with good reason) that experiences shape attitudes, they would allow the community—armed with the coercive power of government—to curtail ways of living deemed subversive of the common good. Communitarians differ among themselves over which level of government should be assigned political control in these questions, though many favor decentralization to municipal authority. The prospect of local diversity allows left communitarians to portray themselves as democrats and pluralists. Once again, however, their position seems naive. After the communications revolution there is no rural hamlet so remote as to be insulated from the ideologies purveyed nationwide by social and political movements. Moreover, is there anyone who believes that a local referendum on pornography or hateful speech would not be targeted for intervention by organs of the religious right, the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union), the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), and countless other interested groups? How about a local referendum on abortion?

Communitarians are certainly correct to warn against the proliferation of rights claims in democratic societies. Where rights are trumps, there is a powerful temptation to avoid the hard work of consensus building by transforming some desired political outcome into an inalienable right that requires only sanctification by a court to become effective. But not all political questions can or should be put in the language of rights. A wise judiciary would return unwarranted rights claims to the political arena. At the same time, new claims for rights deserve a fair hearing. Our constitutional jurisprudence shows that rights tend to expand over time as our political self-understanding evolves. How many on the left today believe that *Plessey v. Ferguson* was rightly decided and that *Brown v. Board of Education* did harm to American democracy?

The irony of the communitarian critique is that its allegiance to majoritarian democracy ends up being more subversive of community than the "atomizing" doctrine of individual rights. This is because the communitarian insistence on allowing the majority to safeguard its essential conception of the good inevitably excludes from membership those persons who refuse to conform, or who by virtue of their color or their sex cannot. The doctrine of rights, on the other hand, is inclusive. It requires that we make room in our political community for persons who are not like us and who may subscribe to rival conceptions of the good. There is no disagreement that individual rights can obstruct the will of democratic majorities. That's what rights are for, because sometimes the majority is in the wrong. □

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David Montgomery

A UNION AND ITS POLITICS

LABOR WILL RULE: SIDNEY HILLMAN AND THE RISE OF AMERICAN LABOR, by Steven Fraser. New York: The Free Press, 1991. xvi + 688 pp. $29.95.

The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), contends Steven Fraser, "was a quintessentially political creature whose origins and fate were entirely bound up with the rising and receding of the 'second New Deal.' " The career of Sidney Hillman provides Fraser, who is the executive editor of Basic Books and co-editor of the important anthology *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930–1980* (Princeton, 1989), with a vehicle for exploring the ties that bound the new union movement to other efforts at social reconstruction through the political order. Every stage of Hillman's life linked him with networks of men and women who then transformed American life.

At the age of twenty-eight Hillman was elected president of a breakaway union that was destined soon to become the most influential labor organization in the land. The industrialized society that produced that union then occupied but a small portion of the northern hemisphere, but it was no longer in its infancy. Enterprises with five to ten thousand workers had become commonplace, urban working-class neighborhoods teemed with people of diverse backgrounds but similar circumstances, trade unions had become a force to reckon with in every European and North American country west of the czarist autocracy and the Balkan states, and virtually everywhere the unions' own cautious and rigid practices were challenged by a massive revolt of the unskilled, as well as an irrepressible hunger for collective power among their own members. The Socialist International, at the pinnacle of its strength, had failed to halt the outbreak of war, and its largest member parties had rallied behind the armed forces of their own governments, in opposition to other armies filled with their former comrades.

Hardly five years had passed since young Hillman had come to the United States from the land of the czars. The aspirations of immigrants, whom he joined in the American garment and textile centers, nurtured the growth and unique role of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America. Fraser analyzes rigorously and concisely the ideological currents among Jewish workers in the Russian Empire and in the United States, though his interpretation of Italians and Lithuanians at times seems to be trapped in stereotypes.

Fraser notes that, although Hillman's early training in the yeshiva, the Bund, and the revolution of 1905 equipped him with the polemical skills, concern for organizational detail, the "semi-intellectual" mentality that reappeared often in his behavior as an American union and government official, and his adherence to Martov's Mensheviks rather than the Bund, prefigured his abiding estrangement from the distinctively Jewish centers of socialism (especially those around the New York *Forward*).

The New Unionism, of which the Amalgamated was the flagship, sank one root in immigrant cultures and another in the Progressive Era reform impulses of his adopted country. The Chicago clothing workers' strike of 1910 found Hillman an apprentice cutter at Hart, Schaffner and Marx, and catapulted him to prominence as the intermediary between the immigrants who wanted a closed shop that would nullify the employers' power to hire and fire and the city's influential progressive reformers' desire to rationalize industrial practice. The splendidly ambiguous phrase "industrial democracy," which had been imported to the United States by academic admirers of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, seemed to encompass both aspirations.

Although industrial democracy meant alternatively to different people collective bargaining, company-initiated representation plans, and worker self-management, the term was most readily identified during and after the Great War with the New Unionism. The veterans of the great Chicago and New York strikes in men's clothing, who rebelled against AFL practices and launched a militant,

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visionary industrial union, surrounded their new president with some of the ablest individuals ever to grace the pages of American labor history: Joseph Schlossberg, Dorothy Jacobs, Augusto Bellanca (who later married Jacobs), J.B.S. Hardman, Bessie Abramovitz (who later married Hillman), Anzuino Marimpietri, Aldo Cursi, and many more.

The Amalgamated organized sufficient strength in New York, Rochester, Chicago, Cleveland, and elsewhere, despite the violent hostility of police and judges, to secure the eight-hour day, improved wages, and an end to such familiar horrors as coal-heated, thirty-five-pound pressing irons, dismally lighted bushel shops, and bosses who absconded leaving workers with no pay at all for work they had done. The union grew dramatically during World War I and forced the government to include labor standards in its military procurement contracts. Most important of all, it survived the widespread employers' counterattack of the depression years, 1920–21, to remain an island of effective trade unionism in the treacherous seas of an open-shop economy.

Although the embattled union drew strength from the garment industry's diverse work cultures, it needed to channel the militancy unleashed by union strength into formalized contractual relations. Hillman and his colleagues learned to cultivate and collaborate with the desire of major manufacturers to suppress those competitors who survived only by sweatshop practices. Hillman also drew frequently and effectively on the support of other groups whose goals were quite different from his own. Most noteworthy was the assistance he received from the Communist party, when Amalgamated craftsmen defended their shop traditions against Hillman's efforts to impose production standards. That alliance, also invigorated by Soviet Russia's New Economic Policy, encouraged the Amalgamated to establish nine cooperative clothing and textile factories there. Indeed, the attempts of Soviet trade unions to introduce arbitration mechanisms and production standards in the face of persistent strikes in urban Russia before 1928 made the affinity between the young Amalgamated and its Soviet counterparts even closer than Fraser appreciates.

Throughout the twenties, the young union nurtured progressive electoral politics, developed extensive educational programs for its members, built its own housing projects (the famous coops), created its own bank, and meticulously compiled and published its own documentary history. As business regained its mastery over the country's political climate, the Amalgamated became the main bearer of the country's left-liberal hopes. At the same time, the quest both for union standards and production standards that characterized the New Unionism drew into the Amalgamated's orbit a constellation of social scientists and social engineers, including Morris Cooke, Mary Van Kleeck, Wesley Mitchell, Leo Wolman, and Ordway Tead, along with business leaders like Edward Filene and Henry Dennison, for whom stimulation of mass consumption was a more compelling objective than absolute mastery over their employees. Together they cultivated what Fraser calls "microregulation" of the economy: securing high earnings, raising productivity, evening out seasonal patterns of layoffs, introducing company-based unemployment insurance, policing the behavior of subcontractors, and creating a cadre of experienced arbitrators, whose decisions introduced an element of predictability into industrial relations. Where no employers' associations existed to deal with the union, the Amalgamated organized the bosses.

As the twenties progressed, business agents and labor educators replaced shop stewards as the driving force of the young union, and communists were driven into opposition and marginalized after the 1924 LaFollette campaign. By 1930, some Amalgamated districts had even fallen under the domination of racketeers (whose activities Fraser analyzes brilliantly). Nevertheless, clothing workers in Philadelphia responded militantly and effectively to an organizing drive in 1930 despite catastrophic unemployment, and surgical strikes directed from the headquarters displaced Louis Lepke's mobsters in New York.

In short, the argument of *Labor Will Rule* is that the change in the orientation of government that followed the economic collapse of 1929 had been prefigured by a new convergence of social interests and a gathering of individuals from many different walks of life, from whose ranks the personnel of a new social directorate was drawn. New social alignments do not just happen: they are created by persistent and deliberate human activity over long periods of time. That lesson is Fraser's outstanding contribution to our assessment of our present situation and prospects.

Moreover, Fraser couches his analysis in terms that deliberately avoid the familiar categories of left, center, and right. Rather than linking the CIO to a legacy of struggles for industrial unionism, cultivated by the Knights of Labor and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) through the mass strikes of 1934, Fraser situates its origins in a

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political culture that blended workers' aspirations for security and a voice in shaping their own destinies with the mass-market orientation of the growth sectors of interwar industry and finance, the maturing of a generation of Americanized children of immigrants, the consolidation of scientific management, the professionalization of welfare work, the coupling of secular visions of social improvement with faith in government's coercive power, and the total absence of commitment to rugged individualism among ethnic professional and business elites, when they were faced with a depression. It was only after these influences had committed the ruling Democrats to the Wagner Act, Social Security, the Public Utilities Holding Company Act, and the Works Progress Administration that John L. Lewis punched the Carpenters' William Hutcheson at the AFL's Atlantic City convention and the CIO was born. The dramatic mass struggles that attended its birth, Fraser would contend, have obscured its umbilical cord to the political alliance then ascendant in Washington. (Right-wing writers like Morgan Reynolds and New Deal liberals like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and Irving Bernstein have always spotlighted Washington's nurturing role, but they have drawn different conclusions from it.)

The main enemies of the New Deal were to be found in the "securities bloc" of declining and producers' goods industries and their mighty financiers in the banking world. During the second downturn of the depression (1937–9) the reinvigoration of threatened ethnic elites and Catholic trade unionists under the banner of "anticommunism" challenged the New Deal in the North, while a counterattack of the southern oligarchy stymied reform in Congress and smashed the organizing drive of Hillman's own Textile Workers' Organizing Committee-CIO in Dixie.

Although the dominant unions of the AFL had welcomed the National Industrial Recovery Act, they resisted the growing government guidance of collective bargaining, especially when the first two years of National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) elections saw 75 percent of the victories go to the CIO. Nor were they delighted by the New Deal's political culture. Their strength during the twenties had resided within competitive, localized markets of small producers, not in domains of mass production and mass marketing: Dave Beck's teamsters in the Pacific Northwest provided their great success story. The congressional victories most important to them had come while Hoover was president: the Norris-LaGuardia Act and the Davis-Bacon prevailing wage law. Contrary to Fraser's argument, their "capitulation to scientific management" was purely rhetorical. Unlike the Amalgamated, the AFL had been largely shut out of scientifically managed industry. As he rightly contends, the AFL's old guard had built its bridges to the Irish and German urban machines of the Democratic party, including such foes of the CIO as Jersey City's Frank Hague and Memphis's E. H. Crump.

In Fraser's analysis, socialist and labor parties get short shrift, and the IWW is discussed with the contempt one might expect from an early Amalgamated organizer. In part this is because, though Hillman always kept important ties to socialist and communist parties, both he and his union cherished their independence from all of them. In a deeper sense, it is because the many attempts of the left to form its own electoral movement in the traditional third-party style recounted in this book were all stillborn. Fraser explains their failure with a provocative, if not entirely persuasive, cultural interpretation of the commitment of the immigrants' children in heavy industry to Franklin Roosevelt. Hillman's Political Action Committee of 1944, with its triumphally statist program of national planning, national child and health care, and fair employment legislation, mobilized votes for the Democrats with special effectiveness in the country's multi-ethnic, steel-producing centers.

The last quarter of *Labor Will Rule* is devoted to Hillman's efforts as a government functionary to combine economic mobilization for total war with a recharging of the New Deal's reform energies. Hillman's frequent failures on the mobilization front and his inability to do any more politically than fend off an antilabor triumph in 1944 make grim reading. Surrounded by military officers and dollar-a-year corporate executives who despised him, "Hillman's actual power to determine the contours of public policy declined in inverse proportion to his official position and prestige." Fraser adds that as Hillman "drew ever closer to the center of power, he tended to forfeit his birthright, that obsidian sense of Yiddish irony vulcanized through centuries of shtetl privation and persecution. With it went the ability to tell the difference between the role of the courtier and that of the labor statesman."

Two major arguments run through this detailed account of the war. The first is that the military-industrial complex that has dominated the country ever since took control of Washington during the "Good War." The point is far from original, but Fraser develops it well. His second thesis will stir more controversy: it is that the cold war began within the United States before the falling out of the

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United States with the Soviet Union. Fraser detects its origins in the illusory character of the labor-New Deal victory of 1944. Fierce divisions within the American Labor party, triggered by Stalin's murder of bundist leaders Victor Alter and Henryk Erlich, were followed by a successful mobilization of Democratic conservatives against the renomination of Vice-President Henry Wallace. The ideological confrontation culminated in an orgy of race-baiting and red-baiting, unleashed by Thomas E. Dewey's campaign ("Clear it with Sidney" cast Hillman in the role Willie Horton played for George Bush). The consolidation of corporate power within the enlarged machinery of state, which the war had made possible, now reshaped national political discourse so as to make anticommunism its accepted point of departure and bury the CIO's dreams of economic planning.

In fact, Hillman found prospects for his New Deal aspirations brightest on the international front. His energies, talent, and vision reinvigorated despite recent massive heart attacks, he gave himself unstintingly to the creation of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). Death overtook him in July 1946, not long before his own CIO ("quintessentially political creature" that it was) aligned itself with cold-war foreign policy, expelled those constituents it considered friendly to communism, and seceded from the WFTU.

Hillman had no time for ideals divorced from power. The rebels of 1968 charged that the structures of power created by Hillman's generation—in the East and in the West—had suffocated the ideals in whose name they were forged. Fraser shares this assessment, but his analysis of the way social power is created and used, and of the intimate relationship between labor movements and the way the country is governed contributes valuably not only to current historical controversies but also to discussions of the present predicament of American democracy.

In the 1930s, he contends, the new social alliances that had been nurtured by the New Unionism used governmental powers to reopen the "sclerotic arteries" of an economy that had been "all but dammed shut by 'inflated capital values.' " Fifty years later Ronald Reagan's planners would use state power to "unleash enterprise" from the economic mechanisms inherited from the New Deal, which had bogged down in stagflation. Within less than a decade the triumphant "free market" economy showed signs of physical decay and permanent underemployment, reminiscent of 1937–38. Who will shape a new social leadership to rebuild America? What will its solutions offer working people? □

Sheldon Friedman

HOW NOT TO COMPETE

UNIONS AND ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS, edited by Lawrence Mishel and Paula B. Voos. M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1991. 365 pp. $16.95.

American management has always been vehement in its opposition to unions. This book demonstrates convincingly that whatever the reasons for this, the impact of unions on economic performance is not among them. America's economic performance has declined relative to that of other countries, such as Germany, which have far higher rates of unionization than we do; furthermore, the decline of unionization in the United States has been associated with the decline of the U.S. economy. Employer opposition to unions must therefore have less noble causes than their concern about the national economy.

This book contains eight essays by an array of new and well-established scholars. The first three (by Thomas Karier, Dale Belman, and Jeffrey Keefe, respectively) focus on the relationship between unions and the trade deficit, firm performance, and the adoption of new technology. The relevant literature on these subjects is carefully reviewed, and new evidence presented. The authors conclude that there is no factual basis for the claim that unions have worsened the trade deficit, harmed the performance of firms, or impeded the introduction of new technology. For those who need convincing on these points or who need evidence with which to convince others, these papers will be a valuable resource.

Unions are found to improve their members' wages not, or not primarily, at the expense of the larger community, as would be the case if union wage gains simply were passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices. Rather, unions increase their members' wages primarily by redistributing profits to workers, and by forcing employers to become more efficient. Herein lies an important key to understanding the vehement opposition of American employers to unions, despite the overwhelming evidence that unions do not harm economic performance. It also helps explain why declining union density since the 1970s has been accompanied by growing disparities of income and wealth, increased wage inequality, and a decrease in labor's share of national income relative to capital. If union wage gains for their members came at the expense of

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the larger community rather than from a redistribution of profits, the opposite outcomes would have been expected.

An essay by Richard Freeman revisits the author's influential 1984 book, *What Do Unions Do?* (co-authored with James Medoff). Freeman finds that far from harming economic performance, unions are a positive force in the economy. By protecting workers against arbitrary discharge and other forms of employer retribution, unions provide them with a "voice" in the workplace (and, though Freeman doesn't dwell on it, in the larger society as well). In addition to establishing a modicum of economic democracy, unions give workers a fighting chance to improve conditions that affect not only their daily lives but the performance of the enterprise and the overall economy. Turnover is lower in unionized workplaces; no longer limited to the option of "voting with their feet," less easily cowed union workers can stand and fight. A unionized work force can keep management on its toes, forcing it to do its job better. When that happens, the entire economy can benefit. Less turnover also makes firms more willing to invest in worker training.

Ever the objective academic, Freeman concludes that there would be limits to the benefits of stronger unions. To take one gratuitous and unproven example, Freeman doesn't think Scandinavian rates of unionization (more than 85 percent of the work force in Sweden) would be appropriate for the United States. On balance, however, Freeman finds the decline in union density to be alarming, and bad for the U.S. economy.

Although it is good to have academic defenders of unions of Freeman's stature, quirks and "objectivity" notwithstanding, there is a weakness in his approach—empirical research with a theoretical perspective rooted in neoclassical economics. Freeman's approach may be useful for interpreting and even for predicting marginal changes, but it sheds far less light on the prospects for or likely impact of more sweeping structural changes. The problem can be illustrated by Freeman's fixation with union density, the proportion of workers who are unionized. Freeman projects continued decline in union density, and concurrent decline of U.S. unionism.

He may turn out to be right, but if so, it will not be on the basis of either the theory or the evidence that he presents. The fact that union density in the U.S. has dropped to levels not seen since the 1920s does not mean that today's labor movement has come to resemble the labor movement of the 1920s, as Freeman suggests. Established unions in the 1920s turned inward by design; they had little interest either in organizing nonunion workers or in political action around a program of economic and social reform. Neither is true today, despite labor's serious difficulties. Hardly anyone in today's labor movement would dispute the importance of organizing new members. On the economic and social reform front, labor's emphasis on broad issues such as health-care policy has, if anything, increased.

An essay by Adrienne Eaton and co-editor Paula Voos addresses the relationship between unions and a variety of workplace innovations, including new methods of work organization, such as team production systems; nontraditional compensation schemes, such as productivity gainsharing; profit sharing and employee stock ownership (ESOPs); and worker-participation schemes, such as quality circles, "employee involvement" programs, and participation in strategic business decisions.

Setting aside the question of whether these programs really are beneficial to workers, unions, or even employers, the authors tackle the conventional wisdom that workplace innovations are less frequent in unionized settings. Quite the contrary; Eaton and Voos find that participation programs and other innovations are *more* prevalent in unionized workplaces. Unions have facilitated the adoption of such programs, and where they have been adopted, the presence of a union makes it more likely that the programs will be successful.

Why? Because "unions bring [an] organized collective voice to the workplace . . . ecessary to insure the genuine participation of workers in decision making." Eaton and Voos also explain how the presence of a union makes it possible to shape "workplace innovations" in ways that avoid harm to workers and to increase workers' resulting gains. They conclude that in a unionized setting, workplace innovations are more likely to benefit management as well.

What Eaton and Voos merely assert is confirmed in a paper by Maryellen Kelley and Bennett Harrison. They present new and sure-to-be controversial evidence that employee participation programs, in and of themselves, are of little if any value in nonunion workplaces. They do not lead to higher productivity in nonunion workplaces, nor is there any evidence that workers derive benefits from such programs when no union is present. Unionized workplaces, by contrast, are more efficient than their nonunion counterparts, while providing workers with a higher degree of job security.

Cornell's Lowell Turner argues that the current

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fascination with Japanese methods of management and work organization is misplaced. It is Germany, not Japan, that offers useful lessons for the United States. The German model demonstrates that robust economic performance can go hand-in-hand with high wages and, contrary to the example of Japan, strong unions as well. Why then, Turner asks, are U.S. academics, news media, and managers so fixated on that less desirable model, Japan?

The final paper in the volume, by former Secretary of Labor Ray Marshall, draws on his work as a co-chair of the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, and the Commission's report, *America's Choice*. Changes in the world economy, regarded by Marshall as inevitable, have, he argues, rendered equally ineffective traditional Keynesian economic policies and traditional trade-union strategies of equalizing labor costs in order to remove labor as a factor in economic competition. Governments can no longer control their national economies, and unions can no longer take labor out of competition, because economic competition has become global.

In the new global economy, the proper role of both governments and unions is to make national economies more effective international competitors. Marshall advocates doing this on the basis of high wages and living standards, but he hastens to add that, if left to their own devices, corporations are equally if not more likely to pursue a low-wage path. Government must force corporations to take the high-wage path, first, by requiring them to invest heavily in worker training and second, by enforcing ground rules that enable unions to organize. The revitalized unions must facilitate the spread of new, post–mass production methods of work organization.

Marshall's vision is insightful but inadequate. Rather than scrap Keynesianism because it can no longer stabilize economies at a national level, why not reconstitute it at a global level? We urgently need new international economic rules that would put meaningful pressure on trade surplus countries (such as Japan) to bring their surpluses down. Why not tax those surpluses, and use the proceeds to fund economic development, as Lester Thurow has suggested?

Rather than scrap worker solidarity because it is no longer possible for national trade union action to remove labor costs from economic competition, why not reconstitute worker solidarity at an international level? Clearly, it is in the enlightened self-interest of American workers and their unions to raise labor standards, at home and abroad. Although full-fledged international collective bargaining may not be around the corner, there are plenty of concrete steps that can be taken here and now by U.S. workers and their unions to help raise wages and improve conditions in other countries.

This critique of Marshall's paper suggests a shortcoming of the volume as a whole. Apart from cursory treatment in the editors' introduction, the question of "What is competitiveness?" is not explicitly addressed. In fairness, this approach was taken to demonstrate that even if you accept a narrow definition of economic competitiveness, there is no evidence that unions are detrimental to it. But the resulting implicit assumption, that workers and their unions must now make common cause with their national capitalists in order to "compete," is deeply flawed.

What disturbs me the most about this book is its defensive tone. The focus is not so much on the good things unions do, but the bad things they are falsely accused of. If unions had spouses, these scholars doubtless would have concluded that they are no longer being beaten. Prolabor scholarship in the cautious 1990s is a far cry from the eloquent partisanship shown by labor's intellectual supporters in decades past.

Nevertheless, the book deserves high marks for demonstrating so convincingly that in the absence of unions strong enough to prevent it, U.S. corporations can and will pursue a low-wage path to economic competitiveness, with ugly consequences for us all. □

James Green

FARMER-LABOR POLITICS IN THE MIDWEST

RADICALISM IN THE STATES: THE MINNESOTA FARMER-LABOR PARTY AND THE AMERICAN POLITICAL ECONOMY, by Richard M. Valelly. University of Chicago Press, 1989. xviii +258 pp. $29.95.

Why is there no labor-based radical political party in the United States? There are two main problems. First, organized labor has always been too weak and too self-involved to be the basis of a new party, which could only succeed as a coalition effort of progressive groups—a real Rainbow. The second problem is that labor parties, indeed, all insurgent third parties (excepting the Republicans), have failed in the past, primarily because of winner-take-all elections that institutionalized the two old parties. Third parties have a dismal history at a national

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level. The insurgent presidential candidacies of Senator Robert LaFollette in 1924 and former Vice President Henry Wallace in 1948 signaled the end rather than the beginning of alternative political formations.

However, at state and local levels independent politics has a more interesting history, as we learn from studies of the People's party's electoral success in the 1890s, when radicals were elected on third-party tickets and on fusion tickets when a Democrat or Republican endorsed the Populist program. Following the failure of the Populist and Socialist movements midwestern radical insurgents tried to capture the old parties through the Nonpartisan League. Farmer-labor coalitions focused on holding candidates accountable to a radical program rather than forming new parties.

In Minnesota an independent political movement quickly led to the creation of a radical third party, which exercised real power in the 1920s and 1930s. Richard Valelly's instructive study of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor party, *Radicalism in the States*, will be welcomed by students of electoral politics and those interested in alternatives to the two-party system.

Valelly, a political scientist at M.I.T., writes with an open mind about the possibilities of radicalism and a good sense of history. He makes an important contribution by explaining why state-level radicalism succeeded in a particular time and place and how national developments undermined the Minnesota Farmer-Labor party.

The general conditions giving rise to electoral radicalism included an unfettered capitalist economy directed by Republicans and endured by hard-pressed farmers and workers—a political economy we have experienced again in the Reagan-Bush years. More specific circumstances included (1) a federalism that still gave states some independent policy options that could ameliorate the effects of unfettered capitalism, (2) peculiarities in electoral politics that created "organizational space" that could be "filled" by insurgents at a state level, and (3) "the availability of politicians willing to break with regular party politics." All these conditions existed in Minnesota during and after World War I.

Valelly's analysis is helpful, but it also begs some questions. Why were party loyalties in Minnesota so flaccid, and why was the Democratic party so weak? Why were there so many "political entrepreneurs" waiting to fill up the "organizational space" in that state?

The term "movement politics" appears once but is not explored as a key for understanding the development of activists, as it is in Lawrence Goodwyn's discussion of how the farmers' protest movement created a culture that could sustain the Populist party in the 1890s. Valelly does mention the importance of the Debsian Socialist party in producing "political entrepreneurs." If he had taken this historical analysis of insurgency a bit further, to examine the roots of electoral activism more deeply, he might have told us more about the role of a chastened but mature socialist left in creating a new independent political party. But this is a minor criticism. The book does take political history seriously once popular insurgency assumed the form of a farmer-labor party.

The Nonpartisan League in North Dakota nominated its candidates through the Republican party primary; after carrying the 1918 general election, they began to enact progressive programs for farmers and workers. When the Nonpartisan League moved over to Minnesota from North Dakota in 1918 it encountered stiff opposition from patriotic and business groups, but unlike the Socialist movement, it did not succumb to these attacks. In the Republican party primary that year, the League's candidate, Charles Lindbergh, Sr., polled 43 percent of the vote. Like the North Dakota League, the Minnesota insurgent group adapted to the existing party system rather than trying to change ingrained voting habits. But the Socialists and labor unionists who were influential in the Minnesota League quickly decided that the strategy of boring from within an old party would not duplicate the North Dakota triumph.

Those who argued for a new party had tasted some success when machinist Thomas Van Lear won election to the Minneapolis mayor's office in 1916 on the Socialist ticket. Unlike the national American Federation of Labor (AFL), which sanctioned the federal government's attack on the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the antiwar left, the Minnesota State Federation of Labor was radicalized by the attacks of prowar business and Republican elites. Its leaders joined with the Socialists in pushing the League to run its own independent candidates on a "farmer-labor slate" in the 1918 general election. Mayor Van Lear only narrowly missed reelection on this ticket, despite the wartime mood of antiradicalism.

Strikingly free of the factionalism that haunted the socialist left and of the urban-rural antagonisms that kept the AFL and Populists apart, the farmer-labor coalition moved beyond insurgency in 1919 when the State Federation of Labor committed itself to "permanent political action" and endowed the new effort with its considerable resources. Given the remarkable success the Farmer-Labor party later

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enjoyed in Minnesota, I wonder what might have happened if the AFL had pursued this course elsewhere.

Through the new Working People's Non-Partisan Political League, trade unionists created a new Farmer-Labor party in 1922. Valelly perceptively notes that an "active partisan infrastructure" already existed to support the party, which had rarely been true in previous third-party efforts.

As a result, in the general election that same year the new party won stunning support. The Farmer-Labor party's gubernatorial candidate lost by only two percentage points, and its senatorial candidate won election to Congress with 47 percent in a three-way race.

At this point, a tough "political entrepreneur," William Mahoney, a Minneapolis socialist and union pressman, moved to make the party more accountable to its constituents (another classic problem with electoral insurgencies). Mahoney's plan increased the power of organized labor in the new Farmer-Labor Federation. He defied those who worried about the "class character" of the organization and those who red-baited him for his association with communists. Instead of a "loose aggregation of well meaning idealists," Mahoney helped create a federation that could make policy democratically, collect funds, mobilize party workers, and prevent candidates from making deals with the old parties. Insurgent party building had never gone this far, even in states where the Populists had been successful.

Mahoney overplayed his hand when he tried to extend his ideas to a national level based on Senator LaFollette's Progressive party candidacy of 1924. Left factionalism and red-baiting hurt this campaign badly, and it soured many progressives in the AFL (which had endorsed the party) on independent politics. In any case, LaFollette was a onetime candidate who showed little interest in building a permanent third party.

In the late 1920s the decline of Minnesota labor unions and the AFL's creation of a new, less independent Central Labor Union in Minneapolis led the State Labor Federation to abandon its political action committee. The Farmer-Labor party faced a crisis as the Great Depression came on, but for reasons Valelly does not provide, Floyd Olson won election as governor on the Farmer-Labor ticket in 1930. Olson's reelection to two more terms made the party an institution able to dispense patronage. Subsequently, two other Farmer-Labor governors won terms in office. The last of these, Elmer Benson, was defeated in 1938 by a liberal Republican named Harold Stassen, who endorsed some of the Farmer-Labor party positions on the one hand and red-baited Benson on the other. Thus the Party's successful years in Minnesota came to an end.

Valelly explains well the reasons for the party's demise: a rural backlash partly due to Governor Olson's involvement in the 1934 Minneapolis general strike, the Republicans' criticism of the Farmer-Labor party's patronage organization, the intense left factionalism in the state's labor movement, and the attacks on Governor Benson, who worked closely with communists in the CIO during the Popular Front days. But the most important problem, Valelly argues, was that the New Deal created a new political economy, new policies, and new interest groups that "organized out of American politics" the kind of state-level radicalism that flourished in Minnesota.

For example, the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) not only undercut the more radical demands of the Farmers' Union and the Olson administration. The AAA also distributed federal benefits through a new bureaucracy and strengthened the fairly conservative Farm Bureau Federation, which practiced New Deal interest-group politics, not farmer insurgency. The case of federal labor policy is more complicated. By favoring the CIO, some of whose leaders were prominent communists, the New Deal's Labor Board helped exacerbate the AFL's hostility to the new unions. The AFL-CIO split in Minnesota gained rancor from a bitter war between the Trotskyists (influential leaders among Twin City Teamsters) and the communists. These conflicts caused terrible problems for the Minnesota party; it had been created by a unified labor movement but a divided house of labor hastened its demise.

The New Deal, according to Valelly, filled the organizational and "conceptual space" the Minnesota farmer laborites had occupied. The national Democratic party worked to squelch political insurgency. The New Deal created a new interest-group structure while the federal policies rendered state-level policy initiatives less important.

In conclusion, Valelly considers whether state-level insurgent politics might return in the 1990s. As New Deal policies and interest-group structures break down, as the national Democratic party weakens, and as Republican policies continue, "organizational space for state level radicalism would seem quite large," he suggests. Of course, at the moment most progressives, like Minnesota's new junior senator, Paul Wellstone, think the

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Democratic party is open to them, and do not see the need for independence.

Furthermore, since the federal legal and administrative structure created by the New Deal continues to centralize government, Valelly finds it difficult to imagine state-level policy solutions viable enough to attract voters. The incentives for the entrepreneurs who mobilize voters are still in presidential politics. The author believes that electoral politics is necessarily the business of elites, including insurgent ones, rather than the product of mass action.

But perhaps "the space for state insurgencies" will continue to grow as the voters demand state policies in the absence of federal action—in areas like public education, health care, and housing. A recent upturn in support for independent political action in the labor movement is fueled not only by the lack of any health-care or labor-law reform at the national level but by the strikebreaking of some Democratic governors and the capitulation of Democratic state legislators to the antitaxation forces. In any case, if any of the current talk about alternative political strategies for labor and progressive groups advances, the movement will need to begin at the state and local levels just as farmer-labor insurgency did during the 1920s in Minnesota. The Farmer-Labor party there left an instructive history of how radical movement activists built coalitions, devised mobilizing strategies, and developed programs that allowed them to move beyond insurgency to successful party building. □

Jo-Ann Mort

AN ODE TO THE LABOR MOVEMENT

WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON? TRYING TO BE FOR LABOR WHEN IT'S FLAT ON ITS BACK, by Thomas Geoghegan. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991. 287 pp. $19.95.

What else does a man do besides keep house . . . and hang around the saloon, after he has been out of work for fourteen months?" Harvey Swados asked in these pages in 1961, in his essay "The Miners: Men Without Work."

Now, Tom Geoghegan, in a creative ode to the American labor movement, asks the same question about Midwestern auto and steel workers—the men and women who have suffered the costs of economic mismanagement, imports and leveraged buyouts.

In the midst of this, Geoghegan takes an absorbing soul-searching journey through "the black sulfurous, White Sox anti-world . . . the South Side [of Chicago] . . . the secret world of organized labor . . . the real counterculture" of our nation.

This is an unlikely book by an unlikely labor chronicler, which should interest an audience beyond the usual suspects who normally read about labor, as well as anyone who cares about the labor movement already.

Geoghegan is a Harvard-trained labor lawyer who represented dissident mine workers in the Jablonski-Boyle era and went on to represent clients such as the radical steelworker (USWA) leader Ed Sadlowski, dissidents from the Teamsters for a Democratic Union, and just plain steel workers in locals trying to capture their promised pension funds after corporate mergers and shutdowns. Geoghegan became a labor lawyer because it was the closest thing he could find to the French Foreign Legion, after unrequited love forced him away from the environs of Cambridge, Massachusetts and Washington, D.C., and into the throes of the 1972 campaign of Mineworkers for Democracy.

Geoghegan is quite taken with the dissident movements for which he has worked. To him, they were real American revolutionaries. As a young lawyer working with Joseph Rauh, Geoghegan found himself in Chicago with Sadlowski's campaign for president of the USWA. Sadlowski, to him, was "a radical in labor's mainstream . . . sixties . . . hip . . . smart . . . the younger son who reminded them of their own fathers."

The book moves from the promise of a Sadlowski to the "dark age" of today. Geoghegan sees a country that resents the upward mobility gained by high-wage unionized industrial workers; he notes the irony of a way of life that brought with it danger and grueling work even as it provided an entire generation and a nation with a higher standard of living: "I wish there was some way, somehow, that we could fight to bring back the mills, with all the high-wage jobs, and then start fighting with our very next breath to knock them down."

In a chapter called "Free Trade," Geoghegan somehow treats the subject in a manner that doesn't make our eyes glaze over and, one hopes, will open the eyes of the comfortable, affluent friends whom he addresses in this part of the book—people who he fears are like the French upper class before the revolution, "isolated, [having] lost any feeling of responsibility for the common people, or indeed, for the nation."

This chapter is unfortunately timely because we're in the midst of a debate about free trade on the North American continent, in which both Democrats and Republicans are opportunistically labor-baiting anyone opposed to a scheme that will reduce labor

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standards in all three countries to the lowest common denominator.

An immediate consequence has been the near collapse of the heavily unionized industrial sector. Geoghegan visits a soup kitchen on Chicago's West Side, a phenomenon he attributes at least partially to "free trade." Mother Theresa has left the miserable poverty of India to feed the newly unemployable of a once-industrial nation.

"Now maybe if organized labor had not collapsed," the people eating in the soup kitchens "would not be steelworkers," Geoghegan muses. "They would be busboys or dishwashers, and the men who are busboys or dishwashers now would be working in the mills instead. Everyone would advance in the queue: the part-time dishwashers would be full-time, the full-time ones would be in mills. And the little nuns could go back to India."

Geoghegan reminds us that organized labor in the 1920s was "even deader than now." Industrial unionism had collapsed; it was to be saved only in the Great Depression, by a newly formed Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) dedicated to organizing, and militant leaders like John L. Lewis and Sidney Hillman. Harnessing the energy of a new generation of East European immigrants—and somewhat dependent on the organizing and political skills of socialist and communist cadre—these men transformed American labor. The leaders of the CIO helped establish the New Deal, along with a president who offered himself to posters that urged workers to "register to vote" and "join the CIO."

Organizing efforts flourished until the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, which not only made organizing more difficult but also made labor more complacent, establishing a form of collective bargaining and arbitration that took the militancy out of the process. Taft-Hartley funds, jointly administered by management and labor, set the stage for unions to become asset holders and investors, rather than leaders of the class struggle.

In 1955, in the midst of labor's strongest period, the AFL (American Federation of Labor) and CIO merged—actually, it was more of a leveraged buy-out by the AFL of the CIO. The CIO's tradition and culture were submerged under the AFL's craft union tradition. Geoghegan is right to yearn for some of the fervor of the old CIO days, even if those days weren't as militant as they are remembered.

This book points to other causes of labor's downfall, from America's mass culture to its labor laws, which are among the most oppressive and least democratic of any industrialized country. He usefully cites Seymour Martin Lipset's pioneering work on the decline of trade unionism—but, wrongly assuming that Lipset agrees with the values of the Reagan era, Geoghegan blames the messenger for the message.

In fact, Lipset's valuable work shows the difference between the United States and Canada—between a nation founded on a Jeffersonian vision of individualism and minimal government and one where even the Tories believe in a sort of "socialist monarchy," as Canadian novelist Robertson Davies puts it.

Consequently, the labor movement in Canada, even though 40 percent of it is affiliated with American-based unions, is more militant. Provincial labor laws make organizing easier, there is a national ethos of equality, and one of the most vibrant social democratic, labor-based parties in the Western world today.

The decade of PATCO* has come and gone. Organized labor is at a crossroad. Geoghegan is skeptical of the view expressed by his friend Sadlowski, whom he quotes:

> How will labor come back? In a strike. That's not romanticism, that's a fact. It'll start with one plant. One plant. And they strike. And they'll be guys across the street, at a second plant, and they see it, and they think, "Hmm, maybe we can do that." And they do it, and they win. Then, somebody in Idaho does it, the same thing, independently. And then all of a sudden you're seeing some John L. Lewis again, a leader, but he gets thrown up, he's just riding the thing.

Although I share Geoghegan's skepticism, I do know that when the *Daily News* unions were on strike, I gave a copy of this portion of Geoghegan's book to a striking newspaper guild member to inspire him to continue the strike and to win it. The dream of such a mobilizing strike is probably more important for the labor movement right now than the actual strike. Organized labor must see itself as combative again in order to wage the battles out of which new members and power might come. Yet, sometimes Geoghegan's romanticism gets the better of him. He wrongly dismisses the new "corporate campaign" tactics, for instance. Although he describes the ruthless world American capitalists have created, he doesn't give the union movement the tools it needs to fight, like the new anticorporate tactics.

Partly, I suspect, because of his experience representing dissident trade unionists, he also tends

* The breaking of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Union by Ronald Reagan early in his first presidential term signaled an intense decade of union-busting.

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to give too much weight to the notion of union democracy as the cutting-edge issue for labor's revival. Of course, union democracy is important, but one can't discount the autocratic styles of Sidney Hillman and John L. Lewis. What Geoghegan wants is for organized labor to transform America once again; to do that, unions should combine a historic fervor with innovative tactics.

There is a natural instinct for institutions in trouble to look with suspicion upon outsiders. Some labor officials may see this book as a tract against organized labor. That would be a mistake.

We live in an era when striking workers can be replaced with a ruthlessness unknown since before the New Deal, one in which American workers' living standards are dropping to near third-world levels. Labor should welcome the energy and idealism of Tom Geoghegan and others like him will be able to help rebuild a labor *movement*—a movement that can bring America to rediscover its Whitmanesque heritage over and above its other legacy of individualism. □

Jeffrey C. Isaac

IN DEFENSE OF REASON

POLITICAL CRITICISM, by Ian Shapiro. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. 338 pp.

In this age of widespread ideological disenchantment, it is fashionable for political theorists to declare the demise of transhistorical "foundations" in political inquiry: to proclaim our rootedness in particular locales and to deny that it is possible to justify universal principles of political conduct. Critical reason, if not criticism itself, has been called into question, and it is widely argued that political convictions rest on little more than prejudice and power. Ian Shapiro's *Political Criticism* is a bold challenge to this state of affairs. Shapiro tackles so-called antifoundationalist arguments head on, upholding a vision of "principled criticism" as the true vocation of the political theorist.

The book picks up where Shapiro's previous book, *The Evolution of Rights in Liberal Theory*, left off. In that book Shapiro offered a critique of the contemporary social contract theories of John Rawls and Robert Nozick, "neo-Kantians," who sought to discover universal principles of justice. Shapiro argued that such efforts are flawed by their lack of a convincing account of human nature. Contemporary social-contract theory, he claimed, unlike its seventeenth-century forebears, can neither rely upon theological underpinnings nor confidently articulate an alternative conception of human interests. In *Political Criticism* Shapiro is equally critical of the "anti-Kantian" critics of Rawls and Nozick.

Shapiro first rehearses the common objections to "neo-Kantian" contract theory: that its claims to neutrality are unfounded, that its individualism fails to offer a satisfying account of political community, that it lacks a conception of the good life, and that it has an ideological character. He then discusses the major critics of neo-Kantianism, including Richard Rorty, Michael Walzer, Allan Bloom, Alasdair MacIntyre, and J.G.A. Pocock. Shapiro argues that each of these theorists presents us with an abstract concept of "community" or "tradition" that fails to address complex problems of political power and that endorses some conception of interpretation at the expense of genuine political criticism. Shapiro's discussions, however, are far from dismissive, and he seeks to incorporate what is valuable in the views of those he criticizes. Two of these theorists in particular stand out. Although he rejects the wholesale antimodernism of MacIntyre, he draws from him the Aristotelian idea that humans seek an integrated life. And while he criticizes the vagueness of Walzer's notion of "connected criticism," he appropriates Walzer's idea that criticism and contestation are immanent in social practice. Walzer is clearly the theorist closest to Shapiro's heart, and in some ways this book is a dialogue with Walzer's work.

Shapiro's main objections to antifoundationalist political theory are that "to say that there are no neutral choices and that social criticism must be contextually informed is not to say what form it should take or tell us how to choose among competing interpretations of the norms prevailing"; that "the question is never whether community but what sort"; and that the impossibility of discerning transhistorical and indubitable foundations of political argument "does not entail that foundational questions can ever be ignored, abandoned, or otherwise be regarded as settled." On this last point he recurs to an analogy with the construction of a house—while it is most certainly true that there is no single blueprint for all houses, it is equally true that it is impossible to build a house without foundations of some sort.

He then proceeds to give his own conception of political theory, what he calls a "modified Aristotelianism" based upon a "critical naturalist" philosophy. His "critical naturalism" involves two claims. From realist philosophy of science he draws the idea that it is possible to have reliable, though never

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absolute, knowledge of the world, including the human world. From a variety of thinkers he draws the idea that there is a human nature and that human beings naturally adapt themselves to changing situations, aiming at *eudaimonia* or well-being. Against Aristotle, however, Shapiro insists that there is no natural hierarchy of goods or virtues and that humans, uniquely historical and reflexive, are tragic beings, who "may develop expectations from social life that we can never satisfy." Shapiro seeks to use some of Aristotle's ideas about ethical reason in defense of a wholly modern, democratic political theory.

This discussion leads Shapiro to his account of political theory as "principled criticism." There is "a basic human interest," he argues, "in knowing and acting on the truth." Political theory, as a form of critical reason about the social world and the constraints and opportunities it makes available, is thus an indispensable intellectual activity that is inseparable from the practical concerns of human living. Aware of its promise, however, Shapiro is also aware of its limits. As he writes:

> On my . . . view we embrace that part of the Enlightenment ethos that commits us to the possibility of scientific knowledge of ourselves and our circumstances, but we remain skeptical of the optimism in which the Enlightenment view of science was shrouded. . . . There is no reason to expect that a complete or architectonic understanding of the world and our place in it will ever be achieved or that the growth of knowledge will bring with it greater human freedom.

Shapiro argues that this means that "we have to abandon the idea that there is any way of ordering social reality that can be read off from human nature or the nature of things as rational." Because humans are historical beings, possessing the ability to organize their world, it follows that no particular form of hierarchy is required by the human condition. Shapiro suggests that this establishes an organic link between political theory as principled criticism and democracy as an ethos of questioning and challenging entrenched social forms.

Shapiro's book is an innovative approach to political theory. While clearly inspired by a Marxian conception of ideology-critique, for Shapiro it is not an idea of liberation or freedom but of truth that provides the guiding ideal of critique. Shapiro not only uncouples the enterprise of critique from any philosophy of history or privileged social group, he also rejects the vision of "emancipation" if by this we mean the lifting of all social constraints. For him we are limited beings always subject to natural, psychological, and political constraints. Marx's image of fishing in the morning, hunting in the afternoon, and doing criticism in the evening is thus a fantasy that ignores the limited and structured character of any conceivable human existence.

Shapiro's book is a useful complement to the recent writings of Michael Walzer. Reacting against the aridity of what he calls "ideal political theory," Walzer has emphasized the virtues of the "connected critic," whose arguments are always grounded in the particularities of time, place, and setting, and who abjures general principles in favor of particular judgments. Walzer's argument makes demands upon the aspirations of criticism (they should be limited), its form (ordinary complaint or reproach rather than grandiose pronouncement), and its attitude (a questioning attachment to existing conventions). Shapiro accepts the idea that social life generates its own practical criticisms, and that any meaningful criticism must attend to its context. But he offers two powerful criticisms of Walzer. The first is that his defense of connected criticism speaks more to the effectiveness of criticism than to its truth; it may be the case that the most effective way of communicating social criticisms to Americans is to appeal to their own beliefs about American history; but this does not necessarily render these beliefs true, nor does it render criticisms based on these beliefs true. Shapiro offers a useful corrective to Walzer's concern with connection rather than truthfulness. Furthermore, it may not even always be true that "connection" is the surest way to effective social criticism. It is at least conceivable that the detached social critic is over the course of time more powerful than those who adopt a more conventional posture. The figure of Vaclev Havel springs to mind as someone who insisted on "living in truth" against the odds and against convention. Now of course Walzer would respond that even here there is connection; but this just illustrates that the issue is not so much connection versus detachment as it is the kinds of connections that are appropriate under different conditions.

The great advantage to Shapiro's view is its insistence that it is possible for reason to criticize, if not rise above, the particularities of convention. Yet there are a number of points at which more discussion would strengthen Shapiro's argument. One regards his decision to focus on Anglo-American academic debates. It would be interesting to see how Shapiro would advance his thesis in a sustained encounter with such continental theorists as Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas. There are clear parallels between his emphasis on human limits and Foucault's rejection of any generalizing norma-

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tive theory. And yet clearly Shapiro is closer to Habermas in his conviction that some aspects of an Enlightenment conception of reason can be redeemed. While Shapiro acknowledges affinities with Habermas's critique of technocracy, he nowhere discusses Habermas's most recent work. In these writings Habermas distances himself from naive conceptions of "ideal speech" of the sort Shapiro rightly rejects. And in his interventions in the German *Historikerstreit* he has articulated, and exemplified, a compelling model of principled political criticism that is strikingly akin to that suggested by Shapiro.

Toward the end of the book Shapiro draws connections between principled criticism and a democratic ethos; but one wishes he would have said more on this score. Is the need for a democratic ethos a conclusion of principled criticism, or its premise? What does it mean for people to "know *and act on* the truth?" Shapiro suggests that for action to be authentic it must not simply be based on knowledge but on self-determination. As he puts it: "It is part of the notion of authentic action that one does not do things merely because someone else tells one to do them." This seems true, but, if it is, then Shapiro is clearly claiming that we have an interest not simply in truth but in some kind of autonomy as well. Shapiro's comments on the connections between truth, autonomy, and democracy could use elaboration.

These comments, however, are in no way intended to impeach the work as a whole. Indeed, if anything, they derive from the richness and importance of what Shapiro is trying to do. *Political Criticism* presents a provocative and compelling vision of political theory. □

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THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF HUNGER

HUNGER AND PUBLIC ACTION, by Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen. Oxford University Press, 373 pp., 1990.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF HUNGER, edited by Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen. Oxford University Press. VOLUME I: ENTITLEMENT AND WELL-BEING, 492 pp., 1991; VOLUME II: FAMINE PREVENTION, 400 pp., 1991; VOLUME III: ENDEMIC HUNGER, 292 pp. (forthcoming).

Hunger kills millions more people each year than wars or political repression. By a rough estimate, the current toll of hunger-related deaths equals several hundred jumbo jets crashing each day with no survivors. Yet, apart from concern about recurrent famines, this incredible carnage is given little attention in the industrialized countries. The neglect is only partly explained by the First World's physical distance from the front lines where third-world people are dying of starvation. The more crucial, and unpleasant, explanation lies in the fact that Western thinkers and activists—and their counterparts in the poorer countries—mindlessly accept an agenda on Third World problems set by the industrialized countries that has not moved beyond its colonial, imperial roots.

The central concern of this monumental series is to explain the extraordinary paradox that millions continue to die of hunger in this brave new world of plenty, of food surpluses, and of diseases of overeating. The papers here speak the hard, economistic language dear to policymakers; the authors are highly respected and the series draws on an extraordinary data base and comparison between countries. Bringing all this together is Amartya Sen, Lamont University Professor at Harvard, who has an unparalleled reputation for his work on famine, equity, and development economics.

The dominant Western paradigm on the Third World locates hunger—quite erroneously—as a derivative of the Third World's poverty, economic mismanagement, overpopulation, political repressiveness, ethnic conflict, allegiance to traditional ties, and utopian ideological politics. In contrast, the authors of these volumes argue that hunger in the modern world is rooted primarily in global inequity and the dominance of national policies that focus on

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economic growth to the neglect of basic needs and redistributive public programs.

Such criticisms are unwelcome both in the United States and in my native India, which continues, despite mounting food surpluses, to be the world's largest contributor to the tally of hunger-related deaths. Moreover, this is a poor time to question the popular discrediting of socialism, the welfare state, and social security programs. It is little wonder, then, that modern economic theories have been successful in misrepresenting to the poorer countries how the rich countries achieved higher social welfare standards. "Common perceptions of the historical experience of Western countries in enhancing life expectancy often involve this misleading belief in the power of simple opulence per se," write Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze, who edit this series. "The idea that the rich countries have achieved high levels of basic capabilities simply because they are rich is, to say the least, an oversimplification."

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But such oversimplification—economic growth as the panacea for the Third World's problems—continues to dominate the policies set by First World governments and multilateral financial institutions. This is so despite the wealth of research in the past two decades that shows that low-income countries from Sri Lanka to China to Jamaica have made substantial improvements in reducing hunger and ill-health through national policies that focus on basic needs, despite having little economic growth in the periods in which such improvements were made. Brazil, in contrast, faithfully followed the industrialized countries' economic recipe through its emphasis on fast growth, industry, and urbanization, yet has an extraordinarily high incidence of hunger and ill-health. "Brazil represents the most extreme case of a very rapid and sustained economic growth—about 7 percent per year over the forty years 1940–80—and a spectacular modernization, going hand in hand with persistent poverty, endemic malnutrition, and occasional hunger," writes Ignacy Sachs, the eminent French social scientist.

The 1990s may be remembered as the decade in which the rest of the Third World went the Brazil way. The die has already been cast: virtually every Third World country, including such iconoclasts as India and China, has the huge foreign debt burdens that will give the multilateral banks leverage to force cutbacks on social welfare programs—where they exist—and to open their doors to free trade and free markets. This makes good sense from the perspective of the richer industrial countries trying to pull away from the depths of the current recession: it is the poor in the poor countries who bear the brunt of "structural adjustment."

Hunger is not a modern malady," write Dreze and Sen in the *Hunger and Public Action* volume.

> Hunger is, however, intolerable in the modern world in a way it could not have been in the past. . . . The enormous expansion of productive power that has taken place over the last few centuries has made it, perhaps for the first time, possible to guarantee adequate food for all, and it is in this context that the persistence of chronic hunger and the recurrence of virulent famines must be seen as being morally outrageous and politically unacceptable.

This series forms the most definitive recent analysis of the problems of hunger and deprivation in the three continents of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The range of issues and countries covered is nothing short of extraordinary. The first volume delineates the geopolitics and the range of public policies that can reduce chronic hunger and famine.

In one essay, Kirit Parikh, the well-known Indian

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economist, argues that interventions designed to improve global food supplies do not increase significantly the food consumed by the poor. Parikh's sustained questioning of the distributive qualities of the market is particularly noteworthy given mainstream economic theory's reverence for the market. He writes:

> Any attempt to operate through national and world food markets fails for the simple reason that, lacking purchasing power, the hungry are only marginal participants in the market. Attempts to reach them through the markets leads to adjustments elsewhere and in the new equilibrium the poor usually remain as badly off as before.

Also crucial is Sen's work on how changes in acquisition—entitlements—can have a major impact on the extent of hunger even without a change in aggregate food availability. Sen shows that hunger can increase despite peak food availability and that redistributive social programs have significantly reduced hunger in situations where there has been no increase in per capita food availability.

Famine and famine prevention are the subjects of the second volume. Acute starvation continues to be newsworthy—and politically sensitive—in a way that chronic hunger is not. This volume will probably be widely read, and is likely to prove to be a particularly useful source.

The third volume focuses on chronic hunger, and delineates the strategies used by low-income countries that have successfully reduced hunger. The crucial factor in ensuring improvements in levels of hunger, life expectancy, and other prime social welfare indicators has been the expansion of public support systems such as unemployment benefits, subsidized food distribution, and accessible health care, rather than higher per capita income per se.

Such findings call for a review of the dominant theories about "developing the Third World." Modernization and growth-centric theorists have maintained that poor countries must sacrifice improvements in social conditions on the altar of economic growth. But in fact, the growth-equity dilemma central to the mainstream economic development model simply may not be relevant to most developing countries. In a meticulously argued essay, Kaushik Basu notes that most low-income countries function at an inefficient frontier at which "there is sufficient slack for them to have more of both equity and growth." Equally, growth and equity are affected by quite distinct policy instruments. Basu writes:

> To ensure the sustenance of poverty alleviation programmes, we need some concommitant policies, . . . we need to bolster growth so that the government has adequate resources for its programmes. . . .[But] it is not necessary to prune the poverty alleviation projects in order to have growth. Growth can be bolstered through a different set of policy instruments while continuing with the same basic needs policies.

And Sen and Dreze note that poor countries that have been successful in dramatically improving health and nutritional levels did not require disproportionately heavy expenditures on basic needs provisioning:

> It may be asked how poor countries can afford to have extensive public support systems. Part of the answer lies in the labour intensive nature of many of these measures of public delivery. . . . But some of the explanation also relates to the scope for reorienting the focus of delivery away from proving an enormous lot—of expensive and advanced services—to a few to securing the minimal basic services for all.

This attention to detail sets these studies far above other contemporary writing on hunger and deprivation. Equally, this series is welcome for its criticism of economic growth policies that have dominated discussion of "development." These studies point to the policy pitfalls of focusing on economic growth and food production to the exclusion of equity and distribution. They stress that the market and growth dominated view of development is flawed: what is needed to set right hunger in the Third World is not untrammeled growth but purposive investments in basic needs programs. Such a view is unlikely to be accepted easily, but the only explanation for this opposition lies in a political economy in which the rich countries rule the poor countries, and the rich in the poor countries rule their poor. □

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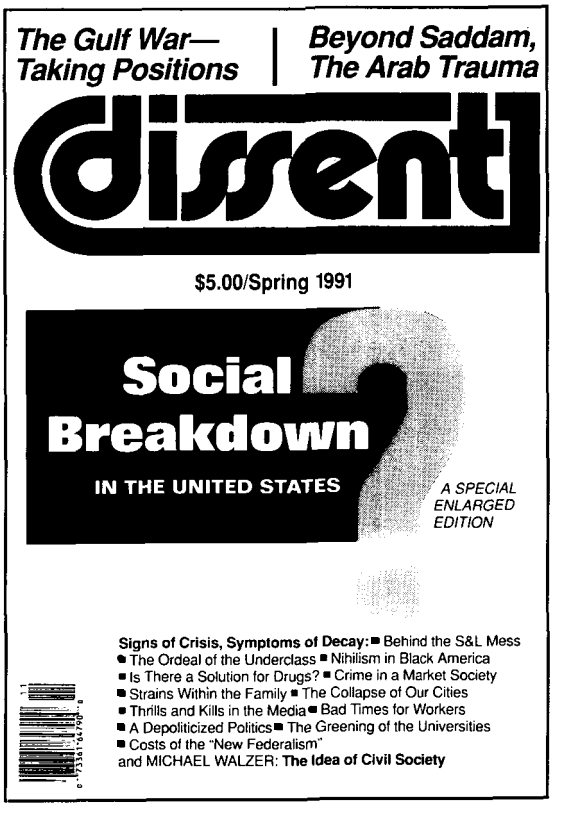
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In Memoriam

RICHARD LOWENTHAL
1908–1991

"Rix" (as he was known to his friends) died this past August in Berlin after a prolonged illness. An early and frequent contributor to *Dissent*, he was social democracy's major theorist in postwar Germany, an acknowledged authority on international communism, and a highly regarded analyst of totalitarianism. He was also a master of the spoken word, which made his limited ability to speak during his illness all the more painful.

I first met him in 1940. He worked out of Frankfurt as foreign correspondent for Reuters and the London *Observer*. I'd come seeking his advice about a U.S.-sponsored anti-Stalinist propaganda campaign, "Talk Back?" Quite a few social democrats (mostly German) were aware that Richard Lowenthal was also Paul Sering, a pseudonym he had used in the underground and in exile as a member of a small but illustrious anti-Nazi resistance group, "Neu Beginnen" (New Beginnings). When I went to see him he had just published *Jenseits des Kapitalismus* (*Beyond Capitalism*), which had received wide attention. In it he offered direction to the social-democratic labor movement, which had been shattered in 1933. Examining Keynes and the welfare states, from the New Deal to Scandinavian socialism, he presented a long-range perspective for the SPD. When the cold war compelled a choice, he chose the Atlantic Defense Community. Afterward he was concerned about the uncertain fate of western culture and looked for signs in the winds of history by which Europe might again play a major role in world affairs.

His conversation was extraordinarily rational, very witty, and seemed to take everything into account, defining each context—a considerate interrogator and gentle listener. After the untimely death of Ernst Reuter, mayor of Berlin during the blockade crisis, Rix and Willy Brandt hired me to help with research of a biography of that remarkable man.

For Brandt it was preparation to pursue Reuter's path, and he went on to become Berlin's mayor and West Germany's chancellor. Rix wrote his chapters in London, where he was working for the *Observer*. For him the book seemed a good way to sum up his preoccupation with democratic socialism in Germany. However, shortly before the erection of the Berlin Wall, he accepted a chair at the Free University in Berlin, and he soon began helping Brandt design an East European policy that could ultimately turn the cold war into peaceful coexistence. As a policy adviser to the SPD he urged better relations with communist governments, without ceasing to combat communism. (Though he had left the German Communists in 1929, many years passed before he could get a visa for the United States). He also warned that by seeking coalitions with the Greens, the SPD was cutting itself off from its traditional anchorage in the unions, the common working people. Though some attacked him as a "moderate outsider," the fact is that, unlike many other Social Democrats, he never ceased calling himself a democratic socialist. While he had abandoned Marxism's idea of

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the inevitability of progress, he remained fervent in his hope that the perversions and destructiveness of capitalism could be overcome. Although he criticized the student revolts of the late sixties and early seventies, and considered the ecology movement excessively romantic, he recognized that both had raised the very issues that made it clear that a market economy required public direction. If western culture was to be revitalized there remained a need for "democratic decisions in all spheres of society."

At the Free University he characteristically did not look for assistants but sought tenure for academic "outsiders" who could expand the range of the university, thereby encouraging my work and that of many others. We had our differences (as on the student revolts). When Charlotte Lowenthal called to say that Rix was in the hospital and she wanted to clear his paper-littered study so she could put him up at home, she wasn't sure he would recognize me. But he remembered the rift. With open arms, struggling for words, he said, "We were . . . but now . . . harmony."

HAROLD HURWITZ □

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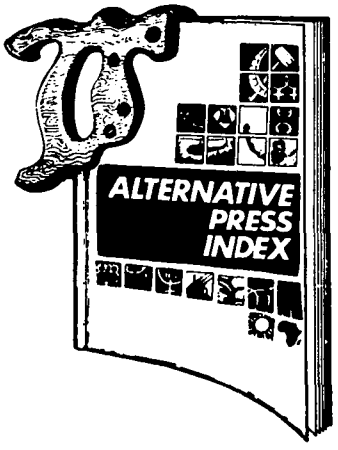

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On "Democratic Vistas"

The following have asked that their names be added to the "Democratic Vistas" statement published in the Fall 1991 *Dissent*.

ROBERT DELSON
New York, N.Y.

SIDNEY MORGENBESSER
Columbia University, N.Y.

BOGDAN DENITCH
New York, N.Y.

ANSON RABINBACH
The Cooper Union, N.Y.

Editors:

Re the "Democratic Vistas" statement: I did add a note to the effect that I dissented from the sentence on abortion rights, so I would ask you to add my name to that of Nat Hentoff on that point. I also opposed the Gulf War, but still, a fine statement.

JOHN CORT
Nahant, Mass. □

On Isaiah Berlin

Editors:

George Scialabba makes some telling points in his review (*Dissent*, Fall 1991) of Isaiah Berlin's *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*—and of the main line of Berlin's thought throughout his career. Although I generally agree with Scialabba's critique, may I make one counterpoint in defense of Berlin?

Berlin built his case against leftist utopianism (without ignoring "the hard faces to [the] right") over a lifetime during most of which the claims of Leninist, Trotskyst, and, most dangerously, Stalinist variants of Marxism to having found the correct "scientific" road to a better world were taken very seriously by many Western intellectuals. By warning the gullible—as did some on his left like Irving Howe—Berlin performed, in Scialabba's words, "an important service."

Now that the pendulum has swung so far in the other direction that it is often hard for anything resembling socialism to get a hearing, Scialabba performs a service by warning us of how easily defenders of the status quo can misuse Berlin's words and ideas as cudgels to bash any advocacy of real social-economic reform.

But pendulums swing back and forth. And even now, as Nat Hentoff's piece in the same issue (" 'Speech Codes' on the Campus") reminds us, if reminding be needed, Berlin's concern about "the violent irrationalism of dervishes on the left" should still be heeded by democratic leftists.

STUART E. COLIE
Ocean Springs, Miss. □

On the Gulf War

Editors:

Here we go again. Last winter, an unholy alliance of right-wing politicians and cranky sixties-era ex-leftists in Germany rushed to denounce that country's burgeoning movement against the Gulf War. "Anti-American!" shouted intellectuals, many of whom only twenty years ago were recklessly comparing American crimes in Vietnam to Auschwitz.

Anson Rabinbach wastes no time in repeating these views in his misleading discussion of the German debate on the Gulf War (*Dissent*, Fall 1991). In his view, the German movement was "anti-American," "indifferent" to "the fate of Israel," a mere "children's crusade" with "greenish-Heideggerian" overtones. In any case, thank God that there were people in Germany who realized that war, though sometimes ugly, can also be fun.

Undoubtedly, the German movement had its fair share of cranks; what political movement of the left hasn't? But even among those whose views I could not share, anti-Americanism and hostility to Israel were the least of problems. Far more representative of opinion within the movement were its repeated expressions of solidarity with the Israeli people during the Iraqi bombings, clear support for supplying Israel with defensive weapons (which, as Rabinbach surely knows, many prominent Greens and Social Democrats endorsed), and, of course, incessant criticism of Saddam Hussein's brutal dictatorship and the invasion of Kuwait. And, of course, many of the movement's leaders had criticized German arms sales to Iraq long before any of the saber-rattlers decided to make an issue of it.

Perhaps a concrete example will best illustrate the point: here in the northern industrial city of Bremen, the fourteenth-century city hall was decked out for much of the war with Israeli flags by the local SPD government, which opposed the war. What this meant was that most of our demonstrations took place with the Israeli flag waving in the background—strange indeed for a bunch of anti-Semites. Of course, there was widespread and legitimate criticism of Israeli repression of Palestinians, but I would hope that this doesn't make such critics necessarily "anti-Israeli" or even "anti-Semitic" in Rabinbach's view.

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The accusation of anti-Americanism is even more farfetched. Here in Bremen, I gave a speech at a rally where I reminded my German listeners of the virtues of a very "American" tradition of political dissent. They seemed quite happy with my modern-day rendition of Thomas Paine. Yanks were invited to express their views in as frank a manner as possible about the movement's alleged "anti-Americanism" at major demonstrations in Frankfurt, Bonn, and many other places. But perhaps I don't understand Rabinbach's point. Frankly, I am not quite sure what the hell "anti-Americanism" means anyhow. The only defensible conception of "Americanism" that I can conceive of could only refer to the set of formal principles articulated in the Constitution (free speech, equality before the law, and so on). In any case, the criticism of American policy that I heard didn't step beyond these bounds. Authoritarian and protofascist tendencies can undoubtedly be detected in contemporary German politics, but least of all among the people that I went out on the streets with last winter. Contra Rabinbach and the "expert discourse" of the German intellectuals, opposition to the war for most of the protesters whom I met didn't stem from a neutralistic or crudely pacifistic position; in fact, if Rabinbach and others had bothered to listen to what people were saying, they might have noticed that there was extensive criticism of simpler pacifistic positions at meetings and demonstrations. Our "children's crusade" was unconvinced that bombing the Iraquis into smithereens could change anything fundamentally in the region, and we refused to accept the claim that the primary lesson of the fascist experience is that citizens should jump into line whenever the drums start beating for the latest ill-defined messianic crusade.

Bill Scheuerman
Bremen, Germany/Cambridge, Mass.

Anson Rabinbach Replies:

I can appreciate Mr. Scheuerman's sincerity, and I do not doubt his claim that Israeli flags flew at German peace rallies or from the Bremen Town Hall. Whether or not these were heartfelt expressions of both a pro-Israel and an antiwar position, or whether they were simply the tactical manipulation of symbols is another matter. In fact, at the largest antiwar demonstration in Bonn (ca. 250,000) there was a speaker from the Israeli peace movement. In my article I acknowledged that there were peace movement sympathizers who cautioned against the implications of slogans like "No Blood for Oil" and tried to explain that the war could not be reduced to U.S. economic or geopolitical interests. Yet, such reactions were themselves the result of the debate set off by those "cranky" ex-68ers who had learned enough about the complexities of the Middle East to warn against such oversimplifications. Unfortunately, simplification, world-end rhetoric, and worse fueled the intensity of the debate in the first place. Take for example the suggestion (from a rather prominent left-wing journalist) that had the Jews staged a sit-in on the ramp at Auschwitz, they might have been spared their fate. Left-wing politicians who never had a moment's doubt about arming third-world insurrections were suddenly overcome by pacifist emotions when it came to sending Patriots to Israel.

My main point, however, was that whether one points to the peace movement's image of a global Armageddon or to the opposing claim that Saddam is Hitler incarnate, the German debate was entirely self-referential. The war revealed the fragility of the postwar political consensus summed up by the slogan "Never again war; never again Auschwitz." The controversy tore that consensus in half by pitting one part of the sentence against the other. Was National Socialism solely the consequence of excessive militarism (as Mr. Scheuerman apparently believes) or of insufficient vigilance in confronting dictatorship, as the "sixties-era ex-leftists" argued (why the ex)? The vehemence of the debate and, I might add, the analogies themselves, say far more about how Germany is coping with reunification than they do about the war, which was all but lost in the din of apocalyptic rhetoric. □

The Communist Experience

Editors:

In his interesting piece, "The Communist Collapse," Irving Howe states, in discussing the generations of idealists inspired and betrayed by communism, that the "communist experience has represented an incalculable waste." Waste means to spend uselessly, without any positive return. Certainly for most Americans who were part of the communist experience, that is not an acceptable characterization. Nor does the extensive research and scholarship on the history of the American party support such a verdict.

In spite of the democratic left's bad history with the ideologically rigid CP, and more importantly having its own appeal muffled and distorted by the very existence of a relatively strong American party espousing socialism while supporting the Stalinist Soviet Union, one wonders if Howe would want to subtract from this country's history the entire "communist experience." With all its sins, that experience surely helped raise national consciousness on civil rights, played an acknowledged large role in the building of industrial unionism, helped bring the need for unemployment insurance to the fore, made contributions to literature and the arts, and acted as a persistent gadfly in a society that certainly needs gadflies.

Would Howe agree that *anti*communism has done far, far more wasteful damage to the fabric of American life than communism? To personalize it, did Bill Foster and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn do more harm to America than J. Edgar Hoover and Joe McCarthy? (For any stray newcomers to this terrain, it may be necessary here to insert that many in the socialist left who would happily accept the label of "anticommunist" equally abhorred Hoover, McCarthy, and their ilk and, it must be said, were far more principled than the communists in opposing all persecutions under the anticommunist legal weapon, the Smith Act.) But these left anticommunists unfortunately had marginal or no impact on national life compared to the virulent anticommunists with power.

Were Howe referring only to the communist experience

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in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe—in other words, Stalinism in power—it would be hard to argue with his sweeping conclusion, even though the precipitate nature of the collapse does lend itself to some ahistorical shorthand.

Elsewhere in the world, the proposition of total waste does not hold. It would surely be rejected by many in Italy, where a vital, relatively sensible CP kept the Christian Democrats from having their undisputed way, and where even today the party governs municipalities (such as Bologna) with enough success to keep winning elections. It can be reasonably argued that in China and Cuba, despite the lack of democracy that blights and limits their achievements, the communist experience was far from a waste to millions who had suffered Batista fascism and Chiang Kai-Shek feudal warlordism. Rather, it can be seen through undeniable advances in health, education, and living conditions as giving a glimpse into the possibilities of a more rational and humane way of life.

LESTER RODNEY
Walnut Creek, Calif.

Irving Howe Replies:

It was entirely possible to campaign for civil rights, industrial unionism, and so on, without lying about the Moscow trials, without denying the reality of the Gulag, and without praising Stalin, one of the two great mass murderers in this century of mass murder.

As for waste I was referring to the waste of energy and idealism within the left, or what passed for the left, that Stalinism entailed—the millions of people throughout the world who quit the Communist parties embittered, disillusioned, broken. If Joe McCarthy did more damage to America than Bill Foster, no McCarthy could have done as much damage to the left through external intimidation as did Foster and his colleagues through internal falsity, cynicism, and corruption.

In any case, it's a pretty sad defense of the old communist leader Foster to argue that he did less damage to America than Joe McCarthy. Communism—remember?—was supposed to usher in a "new world." □

Shamir's Record

Editors:

I want to protest against the obvious falsification of historical facts about the past of Yitzhak Shamir (and consequently also about his present political faith) in Jonathan Frankel's article "Into Year Four of the Intifada" (*Dissent,* Summer 1991). He states that Shamir "in 1940 chose to join the extreme splinter faction, the Lehi, which alone during the Second World War refused to declare a truce in the armed struggle against the British in order to allow the Allied campaign against Hitler to proceed unhindered." This statement confirms the proverb that saying half the truth is the worst type of lie. What really happened then was that Lehi not only waged war, including personal terror and political assassination, against the British during World War II, but it also actually offered an alliance to Adolf Hitler, whom it addressed in a formal letter in the most flattering terms. Emissaries of Lehi were sent to Beirut, then under the rule of the Vichy regime and containing a consulate of the "Third Reich," who humbly delivered this proposal to the appopriate Nazi diplomatic dignitary. The reasons which Lehi gave for its request for an alliance with "Herr Chancellor Hitler" were not only political but also ideological, since in the opinion of Lehi, which they freely stated to "Herr Hitler," the two ideologies, the Nazi and their own, were quite close. On this point they were unmistakably correct.

Without going farther into the details of the disgusting missive which was sent by an organization of which the present Israeli prime minister was a member (something of which he is very proud) to the Nazis, I am enclosing the Lehi "Principles of Renaissance" drafted by the then leader of Lehi, Yair Stern, and published by "Lehi veterans." It should be added that Shamir still expresses the greatest veneration for Stern, the ceremonies of whose anniversary of death he is careful to attend every year. You will note in those principles the one about the enormous territorial expansion, which includes (in current terms) an Israeli conquest not merely of Palestine and Jordan but of the whole of Lebanon, most of Syria, and huge chunks of other countries; eternal war; "population exchange," that is, expulsion, of all "aliens" of that huge territory; and much else that can interpret Shamir's real policies, including the building of the Third Temple. The parallels between Lehi principles and those of German Nazism as it existed until about 1940 (when the Nazis also spoke merely about the expulsion of the Jews as the way of "solving the Jewish problem") are quite clear. It is also obvious that an extermination of the Arabs (regarded by Lehi merely as "aliens" who inhabit the Jewish homeland) is a logical consequence of any serious attempt of realization of Lehi principles.

All this is well-known in Israel, and I refuse to believe that Jonathan Frankel can be ignorant of this aspect of Yitzhak Shamir's past and consequently of its influence on his present ideology. I prefer to believe that this is but another case of the habitual behavior of *Dissent,* namely of trying always to cover up all the worst aspects of Jewish chauvinism, racism, and religious fanaticism. . . .

ISRAEL SHAHAK
Jerusalem, Israel

Jonathan Frankel Replies:

I can understand being attacked for what one writes or even, perhaps, for what one omits; but it is really a bit much to be attacked for writing on a subject of one's own, rather than the critic's, choice. My article dealt with Israel in the years 1988–1991, not, as Professor Shahak apparently would have wished, with Palestine in 1940. True, I did write one parenthetical sentence about the Lehi during the Second World War; I did so in order to back up my contention that in the last resort it is possible to understand Yitzhak Shamir's present-day policies only in the context of his full biography. If Professor Shahak had bothered to read that sentence, which he quotes, with more attention he might have noticed that it describes facts probably even more alarming than those which he discusses

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in his letter. The record of the Lehi during the World War was and is, in my view, entirely damning, and in describing it there is no point in straying from the facts into wild speculations. I find no justification for the statement that "an extermination of the Arabs" was a "logical," presumably meaning a necessary or at least likely, conclusion inherent in the Lehi program. □

An Appeal to *Dissent* Readers

Editors:

Nicaragua, severely damaged by more than a decade of civil war, now faces potentially catastrophic environmental depredation. As reported by National Public Radio, the *World Rainforest Report* and, most recently, Bianca Jagger in the *New York Times*, the Nicaraguan government has signed an agreement with the Taiwanese to eradicate a precious section of the endangered Central American rainforest. Although Violeta Chamorro promised to protect the environment, Chief Minister Antonio Lacayo has proceeded to offer logging of more than one-sixth of all forest lands in the country. Not surprisingly, the deal-making middleman is thought to be a former Somoza family aide.

This tragedy should have a special resonance with American progressives. We have seen devastation of large parts of El Salvador's environment by the brutally repressive government. Even Costa Rica, relatively untouched by violence, is one of the most deforested societies of the peninsula. The Sandinista government was properly criticized for its mistreatment of the Miskito Indians, although it must be said that plans for the logging of virgin forests were abandoned, apparently in deference to the attitudes of the U.S. solidarity movement. Now the Sumos and Miskitos, desperately opposed to the logging, face the ultimate repression: destruction of their habitat.

Please write to the Environmental Ministry and other responsible authorities of the current Nicaraguan government, with a copy to the Rainforest Action Network, 301 Broadway, Suite A, San Francisco CA 94133. Time is running out, and the murderers of the earth are at the door.

PAUL BUHLE
Providence, R.I. □

Problems to Discuss

Editors:

Here are some thoughts on whither *Dissent*.

What has been most frustrating to us in the recent period of dramatic change in the East has been the absence of a credible economic program put forward by the democratic left. *Dissent* is one of the few places where you can find a broad discussion of the issues, but certainly from a pragmatic political point of view the left has had very little to offer the public in either the East or the West.

Dissent could make no greater contribution in the coming period than to be a forum for developing depth to the currently sparse and fragmentary theory of market socialism. Nowhere do we find pragmatic solutions to modern economic problems coming from this perspective. We don't know why most left academics have so little interest in real economic life, but it seems to us that in the absence of serious new thinking socialism is very fast approaching irrelevancy.

Some examples of what needs addressing:

- Socialists are fond of market regulations, yet we are not aware of much serious investigation of the optimal mechanisms that will minimize negative regulatory side effects.
- Similar problems are encountered with public subsidies. How do you phase out subsidies that have served their purpose? How do we counter the "vested interest" problem in a democratic system; particularly the reality that subsidized sectors or populations often become the most reliable bases of support for left parties? How do we measure (value/price) the public benefit of subsidies or, for that matter, any other public expenditure?
- Are work rules the best way to protect worker interests in large firms or are they relics of a different industrial era, incompatible with high productivity in the new flexible production firm?
- How much and what types of capital mobility do we want to regulate? How do we determine the social benefit on a state, national, and global level of restricting capital flows?
- Clearly there is little equity in labor market outcomes. How do we influence or regulate them effectively? What are realistic and desirable goals?
- Can we develop a new array of macro tools that will promote high employment, equitable growth, and price stability?
- Honestly now, isn't there some trade-off between environmental protection and economic growth? How do we navigate this?
- Do producer co-ops and community enterprise have a bright future in the market system? Can they become a major sector?

If writers in *Dissent* could put a finer point on the answers to these questions, we believe the left would have a lot more to offer the political discourse.

CHARLES KNIGHT
S. M. MILLER
Cambridge, Mass.

The Editors Reply:

We welcome this letter from two friends. The problems they raise are genuine and urgent, and we hope, with our limited material and intellectual resources, to discuss them in forthcoming issues—or at least some of them. But it should be added that a similar letter could have come in, and with equal cogency, regarding the politics of America today or the breakup of communism or the rise of nationalism. This is a moment of enormous and sometimes bewildering change, and it is impossible to confront every problem. Which doesn't mean that we shouldn't try. So, thanks. □

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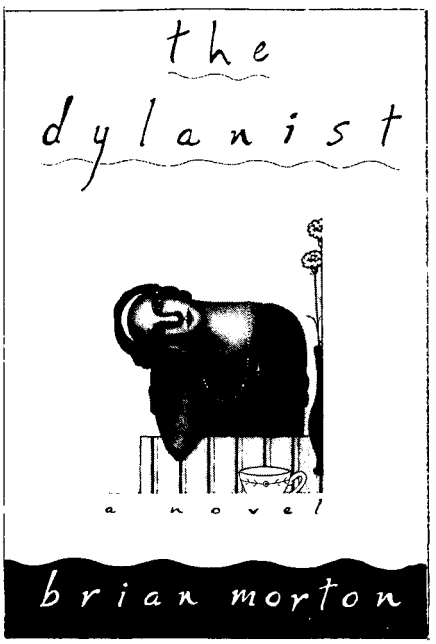

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